The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DAVID MICHAEL WILSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Wilson]

Q: Today is January 11, 2001. This is an interview with David Michael Wilson. The interview is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by David or Dave?

WILSON: David, Dave, or Michael. It depends on what I am doing.

Q: Okay, let's start at the beginning. Tell me when and where you were born and a little about your family.

WILSON: I was born in May of 1939, May 3 to be precise, in the Berkshire hills of western Massachusetts, a place called Pittsfield, Massachusetts. I grew up there for 18 years, attended public schools. My father ran a toy store and a wayside garden and furniture store.

Q: Tell me a little about the background of your father and your mother.

WILSON: My father was born in the United States. Both of his parents were born in western Russia. It could be considered Poland, the Ukraine, etc. My mother also was born in the United States as were her two parents, but her grandparents came from Germany. I attended public school.

Q: Did your parents go to college or university or not?

WILSON: Both did; neither graduated. My mother went to Smith College; my father went to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Neither ended up graduating for a variety of reasons.

Q: It is very interesting; these are two very top rated schools. Well, in Pittsfield, what was Pittsfield like in the 40's?

WILSON: It was considered by sociologists as one of the smaller standard metropolitan areas in the country. It was always used to do research and studies because of its proximity to Boston and New York and because of its size. It was about 55-60,000 people. The major industry was General Electric (GE), which built a very large plant during WWII to build transformers, which was then turned into some work for the Navy on the Polaris missile. At one point GE had a workforce of somewhere between eight to ten thousand which was major. By comparison, the GE workforce now in Pittsfield, I understand, is between four and five hundred. A major drop-off.

Q: Did you get involved in family business as a kid?

WILSON: Only at Christmas time when the big selling period came. Not even in the summers, in the summers I worked construction. I wanted to get away from the family.

Q: About the family, did you have brothers or sisters?

WILSON: My sister is eight years younger than I am. She lives in the Boston area.

Q: So just to get a feel for the family, did you know some families sit around the dining room table and talk about events of the world or the day or the country or city or something? Was this an engaged family this way or were you doing your own thing?

WILSON: No. I was doing my own thing. My mother was interested in the liberal side of politics.

Q: This would have been Truman...

WILSON: When I look back, I criticized my mother as a kid. She took me into the voting booth with her in 1948 and she didn't vote for Dewey. She didn't vote for Truman. She voted for Henry Wallace.

Q: Good God.

WILSON: I was in the voting booth, and I saw her pull the lever. But she was a committed Democrat and my father was a member of the Republican city committee.

Q: From '46 to '50 I was in Williams College which is up the road a piece and Chuck Alberty.

WILSON: He was a judge. Do you by chance know Jack Rogers?

Q: The name is very familiar.

WILSON: Jack up until about two years ago was the traveling secretary for the Boston Red Sox. Williams College is a good place. My younger son went there, much against my wishes. I could see nothing more stultifying than living in a small town in the Berkshires. I lived there for 18 years. My older son who traveled around the world with us in the foreign service found nothing more appealing than having a small town where he could call home.

Q: When you were in both grade school and high school, what sort of things engaged you?

WILSON: I was always interested in government affairs and international affairs. I read the papers a lot. That intrigued me. Social studies if you will, English.

Q: Was there a good library there?

WILSON: Yes real good. It was one big library, absolutely.

Q: How about books, can you think of any books you sort of enjoyed for fun or for learning?

WILSON: One that made an impression on me that starts to come to mind now is something called An Affair of State which was about love and sex in the Foreign Service. I guess that got me interested.

Q: Well great. How about say in high school, was there sort of a social mix there as far as working people, professional people?

WILSON: Oh yes, very much so. The town was very much a working class town. There was a big mix. In fact we had a college preparatory course in high school, you had a general studies course in high school, you had a technical or a shop course in high school. One of the things that I can recall vividly is a friend of mine was running for class president. I was sort of managing his campaign, and I was very friendly with all the shop guys. At one point they grabbed me in the auditorium and put me on their shoulders, I was back several rows of seats in the auditorium. We won the election too.

Q: That's great. Well,

WILSON: We had, it was a very interesting town because the school board was controlled basically by Irish Catholics. There was a big controversy over the Lord's Prayer which we said every morning. Do we end up with "For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever," or do we eliminate that? Depending who your teacher was, you said it or eliminated it.

Q: The Catholics didn't use it?

WILSON: Correct.

Q: I grew up in the Protestant tradition and was always...

WILSON: The Protestants were the majority in fact. My boy scout troop was in a Protestant church.

Q: How about was there a division, there probably was a rather solid Catholic educational establishment?

WILSON: Yes there was a parochial school. It was a very good school. Several of my good friends went there. They were doing very well until they ended up with a sex scandal in the high school.

Q: One of those spices of life I guess.

WILSON: Another little interesting sidelight was right after the war we had a man in town who went to law school at night, an Italian Catholic, Silvio Conti. Silvio in the late 40's early 50's decided he wanted to run for Congress. He went to the party that all the instincts drove him to, namely the Democratic party. The Democratic Party said, "You are a Wop; we don't want you." You are Italian, we are Irish Catholics. So he went to the Republicans, and in the first election he won, not by a lot, but he won. He got all the Italians to vote for him. After that no one could touch him. The problem was Silvio was a Republican, but he voted as if he were a Democrat. He voted with the Republicans to organize the house, but the Democrats really stood up because they could have had him. He was a major figure, but they didn't want him.

Q: It is interesting in Massachusetts, well it is true in a lot of places particularly then, ethnic politics are really strong.

WILSON: When I came back from my first overseas posting, that was in Ivory Coast, I was somewhat disenchanted with the Foreign Service, and I went and talked to Silvio, whom I had known vaguely through my father. He said, "Hey do you want a job with a friend of mine, a colleague across the hall, a guy from Maine named Stan Tupper?" I went over and talked to Stan Tupper and they offered me a job for about $2,000 more than I was making with the State Department with USIA. I really weighed this heavily for a couple of days and decided I didn't want to be tied down to an individual and be beholden to, almost an intellectual slave to an individual. I turned down Stan Tupper's job. He was then appointed by I guess it was President Johnson, to be the commissioner general for the Expo in Montreal. He left the Congress. I probably would have gone with him there and life would have been different. Who knows?

Q: Yes, who knows? Well while you were in high school, you were of course in Massachusetts, your parents had been exposed to two of the top educational institutions in the country you know. One of the big businesses in Massachusetts is education. Where did you think about going?

WILSON: I really didn't want to go to a place like Williams because I wanted to get out of the area. I thought of the Boston area. I thought of New York area. I thought of the far west. But I was intrigued by New York City. I liked New York City. I applied to Columbia College in the city of New York. I got in.

Q: You were at Columbia from when to when?

WILSON: As an undergraduate I was at Columbia from '57 to '61, Columbia College.

Q: What wee you taking then?

WILSON: Liberal arts. I got a bachelor of arts. I had enough to major in either government, which today would be called political science and or drama, theater; my major was political science. I specialized in international affairs. I liked those.

Q: Columbia has always been sort of, it is in New York City, sort of a hotbed of whatever people would be hotbeds in, of student protests. This wasn't that era though.

WILSON: No, it was several years before.

Q: Yes, of various things. It was always a politically active area. Did you get involved in any of that?

WILSON: No, at that point it was not terribly active. My advisor who was assigned to me at the beginning of my time at Columbia, during the late 60's and early 70's was very much involved in some of the SDS people. In fact he was interviewed by the FBI several times because he was involved or they thought his students were involved in the blowing up of a townhouse down in Greenwich Village.

Q: They were making bombs.

WILSON: Yes they were. But no, I was not involved. I never protested anything.

Q: Well there really weren't many protests then. It was the end of the Eisenhower period and all.

WILSON: Well the one thing that did happen is it concerns people like leopards don't change their spots. In my class in junior year, the year of elections. We had the elections, and a man named Frank Lorenzo was running for treasurer, and he won. It was discovered a couple of weeks afterwards he had stuffed the ballot boxes or caused his friends to stuff the ballot boxes so the whole election was thrown out and we had no representative government in my junior year. It came back in my senior year. In case you may know, you won't remember specifically but this Lorenzo then ultimately became head of Continental Airlines, was accused by the unions of a lot of chicanery. He didn't change. He did the same things in business. In fact when we had our 25th reunion he was running Continental, and there was an offer, he would fly any class member from anywhere in the world to New York for the reunion free. Unfortunately I was sitting in Washington, so it didn't help me, but it would have if I had been somewhere far away.

Q: Well, did any of your professors particularly impress or influence you?

WILSON: Yes, the professor I had for one international relations course, a seminar which we analyzed over the course of the year, the role of assassination in international relations. It was a good course. We had about six or seven people in there, and we each studied part of the world. It later turned out this guy was a CIA recruiter, but it didn't matter at the time. That made an impression on me. Another professor of history specialized in the U.S. presidency. He is still doing it today. In fact he was on the commission to look at the Kennedy assassination. He made an impression on me as did my advisor who was a professor who specialized in the Civil War. Oh, and in the area of English, I had a drama professor named Eric Bentley who was a major figure in contemporary drama analysis and writing. He specialized in German drama, Berthold Brecht and all that because in New York if you were talking about a playwright or music, you could go down and see it. That is one of the beauties of being in New York.

Q: What about the United Nations? Did that have much effect on you?

WILSON: No. It didn't enter into any of my studies. One of the people who was at the school at the time was Arthur MacArthur the son of Douglas MacArthur. Douglas came to speak, and that was kind of interesting, having been blown out by Truman.

Q: Whatever happened; I understand he changed his name?

WILSON: It was very strange. I felt badly for him because his father was living in the Waldorf, and he had to commute daily. They wouldn't let him live on campus.

Q: It sounds like a sad life.

WILSON: The other thing that was interesting in my freshman year actually, was the time when "The $64,000 Question," and one of our teachers, one of our professors, his name was Charles van Doren got himself very much involved. His father, of course, was a major figure in the English department at Columbia. There was a lot going on. In fact we had demonstrations supporting him. One of the networks gave me $25 to use my own camera.

Q: One of the major scandals of the time. The quiz was crooked.

WILSON: That was the point. The quiz was crooked, and it sort of downgraded the academic mystique because here he was this professor of English, and yet he wasn't really that smart. I mean he was smart, smarter than some.

Q: You were there during the Nixon-Kennedy election of 1960. This engaged an awful lot of students. Did this engage you at all?

WILSON: Yes. it did. I mentioned Congressman Silvio Conti. In the election of 1958 both the presidential election and the senate election before, Senator Kennedy was up for re-election from Massachusetts for senator as was Congressman Conti. Congressman Conti was opposed by a very interesting person, interesting is not the word, by a very engaging person from Williams College...

Q: James MacGregor Burns. He was an instructor when I was there.

WILSON: I worked very hard for him. I really worked, volunteer work, I didn't get paid. I went out and pushed buttons, gave out brochures. I was certain he was going to win because he was clearly the better man. Compared to Conti, MacGregor Burns was brilliant.

Q: He has written some excellent books on Roosevelt. He is still around.

WILSON: He is still around. I always was impressed. I liked him and I worked hard. A friend of mine said I'll bet you a lemon meringue pie in the face if Conti wins. I lost so I got the pie in the face. I remember that. And the thing that really surprised me to this day I didn't analyze it. How could, not only did Conti win, but he won big. How could Conti beat this brilliant professor, at the same time that Kennedy was winning big across the state? It goes back to the theme all politics is local. He again, Silvio had the Italian vote and he was liked by the people Italian or not. At the same time, I guess just as an aside, this was the back end of the McCarthy era. We had a reverend in the Unitarian Church. He used to use his Sunday pulpit to rail against McCarthy. He brought some people down from Williams College and although I wasn't terribly religious I would go to Sunday service to hear the lectures. It wasn't a service so much as it was political lectures. I have forgotten Schumann I think.

Q: Fred Schumann.

WILSON: Yes, he came down from Williams.

Q: Fred Schumann I remember because I was in class when one of the first people McCarthy attacked was Fred Schumann who was a professor of political science. They called him Red Fred. He was to the left. Basically he was sort of a German socialist type.

WILSON: He'd come down and lecture on Sunday at the Unitarian Church in Pittsfield. I used to go. That impressed the hell out of me.

Q: We were all very proud. Williams held up fairly well during that period when some of the other universities kind of collapsed.

WILSON: Yes, Williams did a pretty good job. As much as I knew about Williams. Dwight Emberson, this guy who I helped get the presidency of our senior class, ultimately went to Williams. He dropped out for the priesthood to become a priest. Nonetheless, he went to Williams.

Q: Was Columbia pretty much for Kennedy during this '60 election?

WILSON: Oh, yes, sure. In fact there is no question for me, very much pro, in fact even now I got a call from somebody who is down here, graduated in '76, asked me if I wanted to come to his house next Saturday for a protest inaugural dinner with other Columbians. Sure Columbia was pretty much for Kennedy. But amusingly, I must have been in the Foreign Service all of six or seven months when I had run into someone form the Bulgarian embassy. The embassy had a reception given, the Soviet embassy, for young diplomats. I saw this guy, and I saw him a couple of times. Fortunately I had gone to the intelligence research people and asked them some questions that I could ask them. I wasn't doing this behind anybody's back. But when security people find this out, they were furious. They gave me a grilling and we went over a lot of things. At one point they said to me, "Do you know," and they spouted off a Russian name? I don't know the person. They said, "Are you sure? Think." I said, "No." They said, "Well," in a sarcastic manner, "It must have been some other David Michael Wilson who on January X 1961, in a reception hall at Columbia University talked to so and so from Radio Moscow." I thought back, and I vaguely remember somebody coming through with a microphone asking various students what do you think of the exchange of New Year's greetings between Khrushchev and Kennedy? I don't know what I said. Oh I said, "I think it is a good idea." But I was dismayed that the security apparatus would spend a lot of time going over that kind of stuff. It was as though they would get something straight, but I really was taken aback. How the hell did I know what I said back then and to whom I was speaking. I had no idea. If I did say it, and they showed me the transcript, I thought it was a good idea. I still think it is a good idea.

Q: Oh God. Well, we are moving into '61. What were you thinking about doing?

WILSON: I was thinking about not going into the military. I didn't really know. I took several exams. I took an exam for the National Security Agency, and I passed it very well. I went in and actually talked to people, and I decided that NSA was not for me because it didn't deal with people so much. It was abstract things that did the treatment. I took the Foreign Service exam. That interested me. Then I also took the law school boards, because I was thinking of going to law school. That came up at the last minute. Ultimately that is what I did. I went to NYU (New York University) law school as a last minute entrant. I began there in the fall of 1961.

Q: Did you know much about the Foreign Service at all or was this just a government job?

WILSON: Well, no I knew a bit about the Foreign Service. As I say, I took a lot of courses in international relations. The research in the library on my assassination project in something called the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), which was at that time put out by the CIA, unclassified versions or versions that were classified LOU (Limited Official Use) in the back room of the big library in Columbia. I got access to them, special permission and all that kind of stuff. I was intrigued by the Foreign Service, plus one of our teachers was a professor, a teacher of French, because of his ties we had a professor who came into government under Kennedy, ended up joining USIA and going to Lebanon. I had a book that I had read for one of my courses called The End of Ideology by a guy named David Bell who is at Columbia now or Harvard. I red this guy's book, and we have kept in touch. He was in USIA (United States Information Agency) in the Foreign Service. So it always intrigued me. Law school was, you know you take these exams, you don't know when you are going to be chosen, if you are going to be chosen. It is very much up in the air, so I figured I would kill some time by going to law school, which did not thrill me at all. I was not happy with it. Though in retrospect, I did the wrong thing. I did three out of six semesters at NYU law school. In retrospect in the middle of my third semester I got an offer from USIA to join the class in January of '63. In retrospect, knowing what I know now, I could have easily asked them to postpone my admission until I finished law school. It probably would have been a good idea. I never would have wanted to practice law, but it would have been very good to have it under my belt. Now, that is with hindsight. with hindsight I realize the level at which they brought me in was the lowest level they possibly could, and with a year and a half of graduate school, they could have brought me in at a higher level. That is with hindsight.

Q: I know, you know these things afterwards. Well what didn't appeal to you about law?

WILSON: It was almost too cute, half playing with words. I wasn't terribly keen on it. One of the things that totally turned me off was property law. Going back into the English system late 15th, 16th, 17th century, how the property law developed. I could care less. I figured if I got to that point, I would hire a good lawyer who spent all of his time delving into the rusty shelves of property law and could do whatever he had to do. I was intrigued by some aspects of the law. I liked some of the trial work. I liked constitutional law. I was very pleased with that. In fact, one of the people we had on the faculty was a guy named Herman Dawson who had worked for the Army in the Army-McCarthy hearings. That part was fascinating. I enjoyed that aspect of it. I enjoyed especially the constitution and how broad it was and how narrow it was in certain areas. To me that was very intriguing. But the other parts of the law I didn't take to.

Q: So you came into USIA when?

WILSON: In January 1963. Again, I realized we had not taken finals and they said no, you have to report by a certain day. I said, "Couldn't you wait until my finals are over?" No. So I came down to Washington on a bus. I had my law books with me. I passed the courses, but barely. I realized again they could have brought me in three weeks later.

Q: You know you talk to people and one of the things you learn after awhile is how to deal with the bureaucracy. You are at the lower end of the spectrum, and you think that somebody has got a list and is just checking them off trying to fill it, and couldn't care less about anything.

WILSON: That's right. I didn't know how things worked. I learned that very quickly. I learned, in fact one of the strikes that I have developed over the course of the years is how you deal with bureaucrats, how you get things done. One of the things, one of the critical elements in getting things done in a bureaucracy is holding people responsible. It is not just this is the way the foreign affairs manual reads. Who wrote it? It is written by people, by human beings. To this day when I am dealing with different branches of government and someone would say this is our policy, it turns me off. I don't accept this is our policy. You know show me our policy.

Q: The great myth of this whole thing of course was during this whole period, there was the policy of if a woman Foreign Service officer got married, she had to resign. People said, could I see where it is written? No this is just our policy. There wasn't written policy.

WILSON: That's right. My first post was the Ivory Coast, and the economics officer at the time was a man named Bob Oakley. His wife was Phyllis Oakley. They had been in the A-100 course together and they got married. She resigned. Ultimately she came back in and became ambassador.

Q: I am interviewing Phyllis right now.

WILSON: Phyllis is a fine woman. She truly is. I was always very impressed with her. I was very impressed with her husband Bob, although he was not everyone's cup of tea. He had a very dry, wry sense of humor. I used to say to Bob, "Phyllis is at least as smart as you." He didn't like that, but I meant it. If not smarter than he, she was extraordinarily intelligent. But at one point when I was between assignments, I was assigned to the board of examiners, we ran into several problems about taking in minorities, etc. But one of the problems we ran into was a woman who was very good, and she very clearly said that she had several lovers and she was going to take one of them with her to her first assignment. Security did not like this, but I argued that successfully, that if it were a man and he was ticking off the number of women with whom he had slept, they would think that was great. Because it is a woman, you just can't discriminate like that. It was a question of standing up to security and I did, and we won.

Q: Well now, when you came in in early January, '63, to your A-100 course, was it a joint course with USIA and State?

WILSON: That is correct.

Q: Can you talk a little about your impression of the people you were with. We have already talked about Phyllis and Bob Oakley.

WILSON: They weren't in the course. They had their first course together. It turned out I would have been the youngest in both classes except that somebody in USIA was three months younger than I was, so I was okay. I guess I was 24 when I came in. Good course, good exposure. The first disappointment I had was that after the eight weeks, whatever it was, the USIA split off to get into a I don't know what it was, and my State Department colleagues took a consular course. I argued in vain, I want to take the consular course because I will need this quite overseas, particularly at that time we had a lot of separate USIA little operations dotted around the country, and you are the only American officer there, they needed to know consular work. I think subsequently in the last decade or so they gave USIA people some consular training. But it is critical. In my later years I was on an inspection team later, I found a tremendous lack of consular knowledge even in the political and economic sections. They say well that's consular work. Well it may be consular work but it hinges very strongly on how America is perceived. The consular section is the first section a foreign national has any contact with. It is critical. That's my view anyway.

Q: No, I agree. I am basically a consular officer by profession. It really is and I think that you have gotten into this almost class structure that goes back a couple of centuries.

WILSON: Well right now people who come here want to fit in. People who come to me and say I want to join the Foreign Service, this is before the joining of USIA back with State, I would recommend against joining USIA, recommend against the political and economic corners. You know those are the glamour claims. But if you really want to do something, get into either administrative work or consular work. People would say yep, but that is where it is at. Take admin. You get a good person in admin who knows what she or he is doing, and you can effect foreign policy.

Q: Makes it work.

WILSON: Yes.

Q: Were you picking up any feeling with the difference between USIA and the people coming from USIA or State?

WILSON: Yes. When I took my orals, I had the option at the last minute of choosing USIA or State for one of those periods. I felt that USIA dealt more with people. Over the medium to long term would have more of a lasting effect on foreign policy. At the time that was a minority view. Subsequently in today's world it has become fairly accepted.

Q: How did the USIA training go?

WILSON: Can we back up for a minute. In my oral exam I took up in New York because I was there. It was a three person panel which was fine. They saw that I had been studying the role of assassination in international politics. So somebody asked me a question. Then to my utter delight, I gave an answer and somebody on the panel said, don't you think, and somebody else on the panel said no. The panel spent about 15 minutes arguing among themselves. I just sat back an listened, which is good.

Q: How did you feel USIA treated you when you came in?

WILSON: I think vis a vis my State colleagues it was much more personal type of dealing. I can recall when we had a Bundy there who was number three in USIA, related to McGeorge Bundy who was National Security Advisor. I can recall a lecture that he gave talking about Dean Rusk saying you know, here come the North Vietnamese communists. Ah, the critical element was the North Vietnamese who aspire to godless communism. Godless was the proper term. They had to get Godless in. He gave a Dean Rusk analogy saying well you know, if you drop a bomb from the air or a bicycle, what is the difference. We did this kind of training. I am not certain it was effective or State did more political reporting type of training. But when I got out to my first post, the political officer was not that energetic, at least until Bob Oakley took over as economic officer when I got there. On Thursday and Friday afternoons the political officer would write some sort of weekly memorandum and then go out. It didn't seem terribly important to me, but I guess it was important to him.

Q: Well your first post was the Ivory Coast. Did you have any particular feel, I mean did you ask for any of this, Africa or not?

WILSON: No, I was just assigned to it. Actually my first assignment, and I found this amusing at the time too, my first assignment was to Morocco. One day the training officer, Art Hoffman came running in and said, "why didn't you tell me?" I said, "What?" "Why didn't you tell me you were Jewish." "I didn't think that mattered." He said, "You can't go to Morocco." I said, "Why not?" He said, "We are not assigning Jews to North Africa." So they changed my assignment to Abidjan and the guy who was going to Abidjan went to Morocco. It turned out it was a good change except for the first PAO (Public Affairs Officer). I was surprised.

Q: I really am too. I mean sometimes we were brought up in the Jewish faith and were you?

WILSON: Yes.

Q: I was wondering did Israel play much of a role, going back and all?

WILSON: No, I mean it gave me a set of moral values.

Q: I am thinking of the state of Israel.

WILSON: No it didn't. At one point somebody asked me if I wanted to get the PAO job in Tel Aviv. I was very torn, I did not take it. I was torn because I was afraid if I were there, I might bend over so far backwards to be neutral that I would become anti-Israeli. That concerned me very much. I didn't take the job. But that was one of the major concerns I had. I felt like it would have affected me but I don't know. In my work in the BEX Board of Examiners) coming in, we were interviewing people from the New York area, who were obviously of Jewish background, I would take delight in saying, you know, "The Arabs have got all the oil. Why are we supporting the Israelis?" There was no correct answer, but my purpose was to see how they reacted. What kind of emotions could they be subjected to. That is the whole point.

Q: Yes, absolutely. You are off to Abidjan. You were there from '63 to...

WILSON: '63 to the end of '65.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the Ivory Coast at that time. Can you tell me sort of what the government was like at that time?

WILSON: It was a one party state run by the PDCI, the Parti Democratique de Cote D'Ivoire, and by Boigny. By today's standards, they have elections and we would have been pleased with it. But we weren't, because this was sort of the beginning of the Kennedy era. Well, I got there just after Kennedy was assassinated. Bobby had been to the Ivory Coast. In fact one of the stories, and I suspect it may be true, again I wasn't there, so it was third party. But they said when Bobby came through he went to mass, because it is a Catholic country, at least nominally. Most people are animist, but nominally Catholic. Bobby went to church at the basilica, and they passed around a collection basket. As the story goes, this guy who was one of the escort officers said, Bobby reached into his pocket and got out a dollar bill. He turned to his wife and said, "Do you have some smaller change?" She said, "Oh, Bobby, for God sakes, put the dollar bill in."

I worked very closely with Bob actually because he had a good sense of humor and in one sense the French were the enemies.

Q: This is Bob Oakley.

WILSON: Yes. We would take great delight in doing things that would annoy the French a bit. We worked on exchange programs together. It was a good time to be there. One of the few places that I felt that what I did really mattered because it was a developing country. I could get places. I had contact with good political leaders. I could have them over to the house. Bob would use me to get some of the people in the media, some were very much influential on the political side, and we worked together. I thought that was a very useful function for someone in USIA.

Q: What was your job specifically?

WILSON: I started out as a junior officer in training in USIA. Then I did the press information room.

Q: What was our embassy like? Was it large?

WILSON: A good size. They had several ambassadors. The first ambassador they had was James Wine who was a political appointee who was Kennedy's Protestant religious advisor. He was fine. Then we got George Allen Morgan, head of the Foreign Service Institute at one time. He came over and he was an intellectual. At least he thought he was. I can recall on President Houphouet-Boigny's birthday at one point, we had a staff meeting on what should the ambassador do for the president's birthday present. Ultimately it came down to the ambassador was going to give Houphouet-Boigny, the President of the Ivory Coast, a copy of this ambassador's book on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. I got a copy nonetheless. That was fine. It was a good sized staff. There was a consular section. It was small, but the problem at that point was as far as the U.S. government was concerned, the future of Africa was not with the Houphouet-Boignys in the Ivory Coast or Senghors in Senegal but Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Sekou Toure. And we could not have been more wrong.

Q: Yes, they basically destroyed their countries, these guys.

WILSON: I was thinking back. One of the things I really give Bob Oakley credit for is that Bob was assigned to Vietnam, and because of his contacts, he could have gotten out of it. He chose not to. He chose to go to Vietnam. I always admired him for it. After he was there for about three or four months, he wrote a letter back to the ambassador asking the ambassador to make certain that I, David Michael Wilson, got a good ongoing assignment. Bob took the time out from problems in Vietnam. Phyllis didn't go with him. But I really admired that about him. I really appreciated it. What was I going to do for him? He went out of his way to tell the ambassador he had a good officer.

Q: Well did you find yourself, you were saying we were more or less putting our bets on the more radical elements. This was sort of the spirit of the times. Africa had great promise, and these so-called charismatic leaders seemed to be carrying the torch ahead of everyone else.

WILSON: Well that is true. They were, but we really didn't give much aid. We figured at least, both Ivory Coast and Senegal were French protectorates. Every minister had his French advisor by his hand. Our job was to get beyond the French. They didn't deal with the Ivorians. I dealt with the university and set up some programs with a Fulbright scholar.

Q: One theme in my interviews that has permeated when we have talked about West Africa has been the feeling of the French that we were trying to take over in the French speaking countries. Our people say this is the farthest thought from our minds, I mean as far as influence goes.

WILSON: That's true. We wanted to have more input, but we did not want to shoulder the responsibility that the French were shouldering. Sure we have a lot to put in, but we are not prepared to put in a 500 man garrison in to protect the political situation as the French were and do.

Q: Did you find yourself particularly in the USIA thing because you are talking about culture and all that which is probably the most sensitive point of the French zone of influence? Did you find yourself being suspect or the enemy by the French?

WILSON: Well a little bit, by the French, not by the Ivorians. I didn't care about the French. I had good French friends. One was teaching, a Frenchman who had been in Vietnam and had been wounded, I had gotten to know him very well. I was teaching his wife some English. He said, "You know Catherine who is Vietnamese, she doesn't speak French that well and now you are trying to teach her English. What the hell are you trying to do?" I remember one of our first international visitor grantees; there weren't very many people to choose from. I mean we were after him; the British were after him; the Germans were after him. We got him and the French reps obviously. He is now a very wealthy lawyer living in France. Spent time in the Ivory Coast half the time. I got to know, as I said, several political figures who were in information or culture, high up in the party. I had a little summer place, a place down by the beach. Abidjan isn't right on the coast, you have to drive about 30 miles to get down to the coast. But right next to my place was a place that was owned by the secretary general of the national assembly who was a big party person. So I got to know him pretty well. In a small country like that if you were active and you showed that you care about people, they will open up to you.

Q: Were you married at the time?

WILSON: I was, yes.

Q: Where did you meet your wife?

WILSON: In Northampton, Massachusetts. She was going to Smith College. I was driving through one day and I felt the need of a woman. I called the dorm; I knew somebody in the dorm. The somebody I called wasn't in, but this woman answered. She became my wife. That is how it worked. We got married a week after the Kennedy assassination. We got married on Thanksgiving day in '63. I had to promise I would come back. Originally I had promised to come back in June of '64 to get married. Then when it came close to my leaving in early December, she said, "No, we are not going to wait until you come back. You could come back with one of those Peace Corps girls." So we got married a week after the Kennedy assassination. She finished up that semester at Smith and then she joined me. Then she went back to finish up her degree. She had six months to go. It was before I left the Ivory Coast. It worked fine. It was very interesting. This was hard for me to believe, but when she was corresponding with Smith College to go back and finish up, one of the offices she was corresponding with was the housing office. She was using the Block Postale international mailing address. They wrote back a couple of letters saying there was really no housing available in Northampton, Massachusetts, but when she came they would give her several places in Amherst which is not too far away. She knew where that was. Fine if they have nothing available. She got to Northampton in the fall, and she went into the housing office. They looked at her and said, "Oh, you are white." This is in western Massachusetts, a liberal school like Smith. Oh but you are white, plenty of places here in Northampton. But they figured Amherst had a larger black community than did Northampton. That is kind of amusing. But they were very good to her and let her finish up. She could not live in the dorms because she had been a married woman and exposed to sexual things other girls would probably not been exposed to.

Q: Oh my God. What about how easy was it to make friends and deal with the people of the Ivory Coast? I mean sort of government and business people. Was it relatively easy?

WILSON: Because they were open. They were delighted to talk to people who weren't French. you know my French wasn't so great. I didn't speak Baoulï¿½ or any of the other local languages, but I spoke French to some, at least I thought I spoke some kind of French. They were very open. That was very different; that was very good. I said earlier at the first post I felt I accomplished more than any other more sophisticated places I have been because there everything is in place, and an individual really doesn't matter so much. In a small developing country, an individual who can make contact with certain people can matter, can make a difference.

Q: Well what sort of things were we particularly interested in exposing Ivorians to?

WILSON: Well, we certainly wanted to expose them to the idea of a multi-party state, since they only had one party really. That we did. We wanted to expose them to some of our culture, our music in particular which was very helpful. We wanted to expose them to the fact that we are alternatives to dealing with the French and just being a lackey in the French order. Those were the things we were interested in.

Q: How did we view Sekou Toure and Kwame Nkrumah and all at that time? You were part of the African circuit so I am sure that people at the embassy were looking at developments there.

WILSON: They were getting a lot of AID (Agency for International Development) money. Ivory Coast wasn't. Neither was Senegal.

Q: Were we concerned in the Cote D'Ivoire about Soviet influence?

WILSON: We were. We were also very concerned about Chinese influence. On the other hand, one of the major forces influencing the Ivorians was the Israelis. The Israelis set up a service corps for women run by the Israeli army. They were helping with sanitation, things like this. Very important for the Ivory Coast. In fact the lady who was heading it up, Colonel Worth, she and I arrived about the same time, and I remember her well. We were staying at the hotel. I had the most awful case of dysentery, and she told me what to do. She mothered me very nicely. The Israelis were on our side. Quietly but they were on our side.

Q: What were the Chinese doing there?

WILSON: Trying to gain some influence. They had no role in the Ivory Coast. The Ivory Coast did not recognize them. The Ivory Coast recognized Taiwan. But they had their own people come in.

Q: Were we keeping an eye on the army there or not?

WILSON: No, not on the Ivory Coast army. The Ivory Coast did not have much of an army.

Q: How about Houphouet-Boigny? What was our view of how he was running things, and whither the Ivory Coast at that time?

WILSON: He was a benign dictator as far as we were concerned. He was trying to bring his people along. The economy ran on cocoa, timber, this sort of thing. He was doing very well to try to modernize the country, and at least nominally he was democratically elected.

Q: Was there any sort of opposition there?

WILSON: Very little. It started to develop but there was very little at the time. But when there was, the only person I knew who had a cause to be killed was a supreme court justice named Boca who was killed by accident. He was in jail. Student movements were very important and I kept the pulse on those myself. One of the things I did was to have contact with our embassies in London and Paris because of many of the Ivorian students would go Paris or sometimes to London as students, so you keep track of them there.

Q: One of our most influential instruments anywhere is this exchange program. How did it work in...

WILSON: It was just beginning. We didn't have very many Ivorians who wanted to go. They didn't have enough English to go and study in the United States. We did not have the programs we subsequently got to give English training to grantees before they got into university training. So very few went to the United States. A few but very few.

Q: The Peace Corps, were they doing much? What were they up to?

WILSON: They were doing secondary teaching basically in various parts of the country. The ambassador justified getting a swimming pool at his residence on the basis of Peace Corps kids coming in from the bush could use it. So we got the pool and when they tried to use it, he was not too pleased with that. Anyway, they were doing a lot of teaching. That was where the emphasis was.

Q: Well after about two years there, 1965, whither? Did you feel yourself wanting to be an African specialist?

WILSON: Well it was interesting. I liked it. The area director for USIA came through, a man named Mark Lewis, with whom I am still in some contact. I didn't realize what a fantastic bullshitter he was.

Q: Obviously a good person.

WILSON: Oh, yes, very good. We were talking and he said, "Let me see some of your writing." Well the stuff I had written had been translated into French. I didn't have the English. He said, "Oh, this is fine." It wasn't until three or four years later that I learned he couldn't read or understand a word of French. Okay. Mark came through and he said, "Look, I have seen your name on the list for south Asia. It is about number four or five. If you agree to remain up here, I can save you from going to Vietnam, but you have got to agree now on the spot to stay another tour in Abidjan. I thought it over, and I agreed. Meanwhile in my preference for my next assignment, I said, I requested the Congo. I thought that was a good place to go. I said, I really didn't care where I went. The only places I did not want to go were South Africa and Germany. Sure enough in the middle of December I got a cable ordering me to go to Cape Town. Which was fun.

Q: So you went to Cape Town.

WILSON: I came on home leave and went to Cape Town.

Q: You were there from when to when?

WILSON: About the beginning of '66 to the fall of '68.

Q: What job did you have in Cape Town?

WILSON: I was the branch public affairs officer in Cape Town.

Q: Where was sort of the head office?

WILSON: Well that is an interesting question. You obviously asked it because you know the answer. The public affairs officer was with the embassy in Pretoria, but when the embassy in Pretoria, the ambassador, DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), political officer, economic officer moved down to Cape Town where the parliament is for four and a half months of the year, the PAO in Pretoria stayed in Pretoria and I in effect was the country PAO. It was a one person post.

Q: What was the situation in South Africa in the 1966 to 1968 period?

WILSON: It was very tense. Cape Town, if you will, was a bit like Boston. It was the sort of the intellectual, the long haired capital of the country. There was a university, the University of Cape Town, which Bobby Kennedy visited. It had something called the advanced league for southern students which was leading the opposition to the government. But about 20 miles away in a town called Stellenbosch there was the University of Stellenbosch which was an Afrikaans university from which five of the then six prime ministers of the country had graduated. So it was sort of the intellectual root of the Afrikaner movement. I had my first taste of real politics there. I worked obviously with the students at the University of Cape Town, but I also started to work very closely with both the students and some of the administration at the University of Stellenbosch. They speak Afrikaans, and I was dealing with a guy who was director of development there. I discovered he was the head of the so-called Broderbund, the secret South African society, he was head of the area group there, the secret South African Afrikaner group that kept things going. About a year into my term, the ambassador called me in and said that he had word that I was about to be PNGed, persona non grata because of my contacts with the South African Student Union, the English speaking student union. I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I find that hard to believe, because I am doing nothing more than some of my other predecessors did. I may be a little more active. I think the real reason is my contact with the South African Afrikaner students at Stellenbosch. That is what the government doesn't like." In any case I was prepared to leave along with my wife. We had someone at the South African mission to the UN in New York who was then going to be declared persona non grata if they declared me persona non grata. They didn't, and so I stayed. They were very sensitive about that, about my dealings with the Afrikaners. I realized that whenever I went up there I was a jerk. There is no question.

Q: What were you doing with them? I mean what were they so upset about?

WILSON: I was a contact. I was maybe showing them films or giving them some books, talking to them, that's all. Which could be a very annoying thing if you want to run a closed society. But interestingly I was there when the Six Day War between the Israelis and Arabs...

Q: June of '67.

WILSON: Yes, about that time. And per capita South Africans, particularly the Afrikaners, contributed more to Israel than any other country in the world, per capita. Obviously the U.S. contributed more. But the philosophy behind that was very interesting, namely that we, the Afrikaners, like the Jews, like the Israelis, are God's chosen people and we are surrounded by infidels, by these blacks in the case of South Africans, by the Arabs in the case of the Jews. We feel a great kinship to the Jews because we know what they are going through. So staunch support for the Jews. It was quite nice, it worked out very well.

Q: Well, 1966-1968 was pretty much the high point of our civil rights movement in the United States. Things were really...

WILSON: Well '68 was the assassination of Kennedy and King.

Q: How was that, I mean obviously you are doing the USIA thing, how did you handle that?

WILSON: Well the first question that always got thrown up at you whenever you are trying to talk about civil rights is, would you want your daughter or son to marry one. I mean that is the first thing out. You have to deal with people as individuals, not by the color of their skin. Actually the more interesting question came up was the Vietnam war, how we dealt with that. In effect the South Africans were more or less supporting us because it was anti-communism. They were violent anti-communists, so we just had to reinforce that a little bit. It wasn't a difficult thing. The race relations in the United States really didn't come to the fore. People knew about it, but it didn't in any way impede our dealings with the South Africans.

Q: Well did you find any curiosity maybe saying you know, this is the way we are going to have to, looking at the turmoil you are going through and ours is to the tenth degree more serious. How are we going to do it looking at the way you did it and all?

WILSON: To some extent, but don't forget Cape Town was not Pretoria and Johannesburg was not Durban and there was not that intense feeling. People were more intellectual, more liberal about it with their contacts. So there certainly was an undercurrent, but there wasn't a very major issue.

Q: And this was not a theme that you were sort of tasked to drive home. Apartheid is bad, do something.

WILSON: Well, we didn't come right out and say apartheid is bad, but we said you can not continue to live this way. It is going to bring down your country. Oh, yes, we did that from the start. They accepted that. There is a large naval base near Cape Town called Simon's Town. At one point the local government banned all the Bantu, banned all the blacks, from the area. Suddenly nothing got done. Garbage wasn't being picked up, the streets weren't cleaned. Then there was a big movement, bring back our blacks. Ironically, Stuart, and this is a personal view, the South Africa that I saw at least from the Cape, was more integrated economically at least than was the United States. Because the South African economy could not have existed without the blacks or coloreds, whereas the United States economy could have. In Cape Town we dealt mainly with the Cape coloreds as opposed to the blacks, the Bantu. That was the dominant non-white group. Because of the smallness of the society, obviously many of the Afrikaners had Cape colored ancestors. It is just obvious. The divisions were not that great. One of the educators with whom I worked very closely and studied the United States used to say it doesn't matter to us, Cape coloreds, who is in power. Whether it is the whites, the Afrikaners, or the blacks we are always going to be the bronze spread in between the white bread and the black bread. We are always going to be there. Culturally the Cape coloreds probably felt themselves more akin to the whites than they did to the Bantu, to the blacks. One of the things that I used to work with in one of the black townships there was a stage play group that we helped get some American plays, help them out a little bit. But the Cape coloreds felt much more akin to the whites than they did to the blacks. We had apartheid. One of my good contacts was a major figure in the very liberal movement, and he was banned. He couldn't be around more than three other people socially. I could have him over. He had a house out in the country. He had a dog. He would let the dog out, and if the South African police were to come we would just get out of the room where this guy was so there would be no problem. Ultimately he left the country and went to England. He had gotten a lot of medical grants from NIH (National Institute of Health) to do some study. He was one of the three or four leading figures in thyroid study, in medicine. We gave him a lot of grants. But he was very liberal, and he was very wealthy too.

Q: Was there sort of a good solid demarcation between the Afrikaans speaking and the English speaking people, whites there at that time?

WILSON: There wasn't a great demarcation except that the two English speaking newspapers always delighted when an Afrikaner was caught breaking the anti-miscegenation laws. They would publicize this greatly. I knew people in the progressive party of the Liberals and the United Party and the government party and dealt with all of them. It was part of my job.

Q: Speaking of your job, what were you doing? I mean were you going around and showing films, having books, reading books?

WILSON: Yes, and going around with newspapers, dealing with the media, developing exchange programs, Fulbright exchange programs, various things. Not Fulbright, because they didn't have a Fulbright commission there, but exchange programs nonetheless.

Q: How about with the media? Was there, were they receptive with what we had to distribute?

WILSON: Yes, both the English, and I found a way to deal with the Afrikaans media. The most influential Afrikaans paper in the country was something called Die Burger. I eventually got to know both their area editing chief and their foreign editor. I made it my point to. That worked pretty well. I mean they didn't embrace me and say we accept all your views, but at least they were receptive to what I had to say. They understood why we were doing what we were doing in our foreign policy in any case.

Q: Were you picking up any feel about what was the end game going to be?

WILSON: No because I don't know if people thought that far ahead. I personally thought the end game would end in bloodshed. I was extraordinarily delighted that it did not.

Q: I remember I was in African INR, not dealing with South Africa. We would sit around and talk, and the consensus was pretty much, this is early 60's, there would be a night of long knives, you know.

WILSON: Well the other thing that I found very interesting. On the cultural scene in Cape Town there are a lot of Jews.

Q: I thought Johannesburg would have had more.

WILSON: Sure they did, but in the cultural scene there were a lot. Slow to the business scene. I got to know one guy who ran a music store. His name was Hans Kramer who was straight from Germany. I said, "Hans, how can you for god's sakes support the nationalist party?" It was very interesting. He and others would say, "You know we have had to flee three times. We are here. We don't intend to have to flee again. That's why we can support the nationalist party." Then just as I was leaving, the minister of justice whose name escapes me, who later became a prime, not Vorster, before Jan Vorster. I don't remember at least offhand. They arrested some students up in Johannesburg, and he made a plea to the parents of Jewish students saying please rein in your children. We know you are good, loyal South Africans. But the student movement was a very important, very effective movement. There was a certain amount of anti-Semitism beneath the surface of the Afrikaner, but as I said, they also supported Israel very strongly.

Q: What about was Soweto in existence when you were there?

WILSON: Sure.

Q: Did you have much contact with it?

WILSON: I didn't.

Q: I was just wondering because later on we made a real effort to get into Soweto, I think with our programs and all that.

WILSON: No we didn't at this point.

Q: Who was our ambassador or ambassadors while you were there?

WILSON: The ambassador when I was there was a man named William Manning Rountree. A kind of a stuffed shirt, but I got along with him. His wife at one point was so ticked off at some of the wives of the military that she forced them to sit down and read to each other from the book of diplomatic etiquette. I don't think he was a great ambassador frankly. He wasn't bad. He became assistant secretary for something, economic affairs or something.

Q: Well I am trying to capture the times. Did you feel that you had a sense of mission while you were there, that later I think, times changed particularly in the 70's and 80's.

WILSON: Obviously we did not support apartheid and would let the government know that. I was there when the prime minister, Verwoerd was assassinated in the parliament. They came up with a very novel, I mean it turned out though it never got publicized that the assassin had been dealing with our consular section for a long time to get a visa to go the United States. We were very hesitant to give it to him. The South Africans ended up handling it very nicely. He was not executed; he was put in a mental institution on the basis that only a mentally deficient person would want to kill this great prime minister. Good philosophy. It worked very well. I worked very closely with some of our British allies. The Dutch weren't so easy to work with. They caused a lot of problems with apartheid. It is interesting because those of English speaking descent tended to be more white gloves, you know, didn't want to deal with blacks and non-whites. Whereas the Afrikaners while there was apartheid, you know, they slept with them. You know, a different relationship.

Q: It is that way in the United States during this time. You have, you know, northerners who are talking big about doing things, but basically there was to a certain extent in certain areas a much closer integrated society in the south. People had been living and sleeping and eating together for a long time.

WILSON: People were integrated working with people of all races, and they had to. Non whites clearly outnumbered the whites and were a vital part of the economy of the country. I am going to have to leave you.

Q: Okay. I just want to quickly put at the end here, we will pick up the next time you went, where did you go in '68? Where did you go, back to Washington?

WILSON: Back to Washington.

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Q: Today is February 5, 2001. David, in 1968 you were where?

WILSON: At the beginning of the year I was in Cape Town, South Africa, the branch public affairs officer.

Q: And you came back to Washington.

WILSON: Right, in roughly July or August.

Q: What were you doing back in Washington?

WILSON: I was in a new experimental program which USIA called "phase two" which is like soap except it wasn't soap. They took first or second tour officers, second tour officers and they wanted to run them through all the activities the agency engaged in, in Washington. So I came back for whatever the period it was supposed to be, and I worked in various elements of the agency from exhibits to motion pictures, etc. One part I wanted to work in I was denied the right to do so. That was our office of congressional liaison. Because the office of congressional liaison was very sacred, they didn't want anybody fooling around with it and seeing what actually happens. The other part that I wanted to work in was on the staff of the advisory commission and information. After considerable discussion I was told no you can't do that because the advisory commission discusses personalities of officers and people, and what they say has to remain private. If you were there, there is a possibility of it getting out. You can't have a Foreign Service Officer doing that, involved in that kind of stuff. Subsequently, I raised a stink, but it didn't do any good. Subsequently, about ten years later, a Foreign Service Officer actually became the staff director. But at that point they figured no Foreign Service Officers. So I did a variety of functions from motion pictures to exhibits to books to wire response services for a period of a year or so. Meanwhile, I applied for what is known as a Congressional fellowship. At that point it was run totally by the American Political Science Association. One USIA officer had the position before me, and he ultimately left the agency. I applied for it, and was told no, we are not sending anybody else on this kind of work because we are afraid you are going to leave the agency. Okay, I went ahead though, and gave them my application. One night I recall, I got a phone call saying I should report to the Civil Service Commission which is what OMB was called at that point, because they wanted to interview me for the Congressional fellowship. Unlike now when foreign affairs fellows just name your own fellowship, you had to interview. Some people were chosen and some weren't. So I said, "What brought about the big change?" They said, "Well let's say the big change was looming on the horizon." Meaning that Henry Loomis was the director of USIA and he thought it was a good thing to have a USIA person in the fellowship, and I was the person who applied, so they sent me over. I got the fellowship, and I began. You do three or four months of study and lectures, then you go around and try to find yourself a job first in the house and then in the senate, and then you change. At least that is the way it was set up. I did that. My first job was working with Senator William Proxmire from Wisconsin on the senate side. In the middle of that I came back to the agency for some reason, and I ran into the director of foreign service personnel in the elevator. He said, "I hope you are not going to leave us when you finish your fellowship?" I said, "Well you know," a guy named Halsema, "You know Jim, that really depends on my assignment. What are you going to do with me." Within two weeks, I got notice that I was assigned as assistant information officer, London, which was very nice.

Q: That took care of that. It sounds like they wanted to nail the thing down.

WILSON: Yes, that's true. But I had a major problem, and that is at the time I had a very large dog. Because of what had happened recently in London, in England, there was no longer a six month quarantine, they were not allowing animals in at all. So I began to scout around to see what I could do. The best solution I had was to take the dog into Ireland and get him smuggled across the Irish Sea and bring him in that way. Which was doable. I am not certain it would have been the best thing in the world for an American Foreign Service Officer to do, particularly if he were caught. But that was the only possibility. This didn't sound too plausible to me, so I actually put it in the back of my mind. Then somebody came to me because I was doing some press work in eastern Europe. They said, "Hey, how would you like to go to Moscow as information officer?" They said, "It would require a year of language training in Russian." Given the atmosphere at the time in Washington, and the fact a guy named Frank Shakespeare was heading up the U.S. information agency. He was very big on service in Russia and eastern Europe. You have got to get those commies. It was a plum assignment. So by accepting the offer to go to the Soviet Union, and learning Russian, I could very easily get out of my assignment to London without blooding any oath. I couldn't have gotten out of my assignment to London saying I don't want to go to London. But saying look, I think I might be more valuable if I learned Russian and went to the Soviet Union, it worked very well.

Q: Tell me a bit about what you picked up working for Proxmire?

WILSON: What did I pick up?

Q: What was your impression of the senate and how it operated as it related to the world of foreign affairs?

WILSON: Well one of the reasons when I was interviewing on the Hill, I made a point of interviewing with people who had nothing to do with foreign affairs. I wanted to deal strictly with domestic affairs. Proxmire was at time chairman of the joint economic committee, you know, economic matters. When I joined his staff, he was big into this C-5A cost override with the Defense Department.

Q: C-5A is a large military transport.

WILSON: That is correct, it was built by Lockheed and he opposed it very strongly. At the same time he was working on some credit card legislation as chairman of what was at that time called the banking and currency committee. It is no longer called that. Proxmire had a very sharp mind, but was very rigid in his approach to people and his approach to office work. He would come through the office at 9:00. If you weren't at your desk, you were theoretically docked lunch. You couldn't go to lunch if you weren't at your desk by 9:00. He was very rigid about that. He didn't want you to start work before 9:00 either, because one day I had done something put in the ranks of the news people, and put it in the night before, a statement concerning an idea that I had that Proxmire liked. I got a call about 8:30 in the morning from ABC news saying they would like to interview Proxmire for their 9:00 radio news program. Of course you had to do that a bit before. So I went in to the Senator's office, knock on the door before 8:30, and boy did I catch hell. You don't come into my office before 9:00. Work begins at 9:00 not at 8:30. I said, "but ABC wants..." "No!" He was very rigid. For example no one in our office was allowed to accept any gifts from any lobbyist of any type with the exception of cheese from Wisconsin. If someone from Wisconsin offered cheese, you could accept, but we had to consume it in the office. He was very rigid.

Q: Did you get somebody from the House?

WILSON: Yes, but on the Proxmire thing in addition to working on the C-5A affair, and then there was an amusing incident during that. Someone else on the armed services committee was holding hearings. Senator Proxmire was going to testify. They normally exchanged written testimony beforehand. I was talking to this senator's staff, and he looked at this and said, "Please instruct Senator Proxmire to please ask the questions, to please not get ahead of the script, the way things were laid out, and to not answer the questions before they were asked, and under no circumstances could he discuss things out of order because this would confuse the senator who was asking the question." The staff said he wasn't very sharp in doing this kind of stuff, and that it would look foolish if Proxmire got ahead of the game, they would look foolish. They were pretty good about that. But the thing I had the most... not only working for Proxmire but I think in my professional career was working with Proxmire's staff on the banking and currency committee on the credit card legislation. Because we, and I was a part of it, perhaps not a vital part, but maybe a vital part, I don't know. We crafted legislation which is still in effect today 25 years later which provides that the maximum liability any credit card holder has if the credit card is lost or stolen or illegally used is $50 maximum, no matter what else happens. If the person loses the credit card and reports it in three days to the credit card company, there is no liability. To me, because I very strongly believe in consumer affairs, this was a major step.

Q: Oh, yes.

WILSON: And that part of the legislation still exists. Parts have been modified, but it is there. During the hearings there were two amusing incidents. At one point with the closed hearing of just the senators, they were discussing that at that point in the early 70's people were getting credit cards in the mail unsolicited. The banks claimed they never sent out unsolicited credit cards. Well, we had a case where the author of a book right after WWII called The Secret of Santa Vittoria had his phone listed in Manhattan but under the name of the hero of the book, not under his own name. Lo and behold, he got a credit card. The guy doesn't exist except in the novel. There went the bank's claim they never sent unsolicited credit cards. They used the phone book, just going down the list. Secondly and more amusingly, in the closed session with some of the senators, everyone was taking out their credit cards and was seeing how hard it was to destroy them. They were bending them. Senator Percy, who was on the committee from Illinois, didn't realize what he was saying. They were talking about how these credit cards were usually sent out in September or October before Christmas, and how many people ran up debt they couldn't afford to pay. Senator Percy with a straight face said, "You know it is strange. I never have any trouble paying my credit card bills." I mean it broke us all up. He had enough money.

Q: He had been president of Bell and Howell.

WILSON: Exactly. He had a lot of money. But he didn't realize the humor of what he was saying. On the house side, I worked with a man from whom I learned a lot about how Congress works. Because this is a much sought after position, many congressional fellows like him because the congressman lets you sit right in his personal office. The congressional fellow had a desk right in his office. They had been taking political scientists, but for some reason they liked me and they took me.

This is a man named Frank Thompson Jr. from New Jersey. Thompson was the ranking Democratic member on the education and labor committee. He engineered the overthrow of Adam Clayton Powell. He was a very liberal Democrat. I remember one of the leaders, in fact, of the so-called Democratic Study Group, the DSG, but he wasn't very public. He was chairman of a committee which not many people had heard of, and that was the Committee on Administration in the House. Very much of an internal type thing. But I learned quickly that that's what makes the house go around, because the Committee on Administration is responsible for the assignment of offices. They are responsible for all the papers you get, the amount of money you get for running your offices, things that are important. When I went over there, I used to drive to work. They said, "Just go into the House garage, just tell them you are working for Frank Thompson." I got a parking space directly under the elevator that would lead to the house. I couldn't believe this, but that's the way things worked. You know the House Committee on Administration was an extraordinarily important committee as far as the rest of the House is concerned. Thompson knew how to make legislation work. He was an extraordinarily liberal Democrat, but he worked with extreme right-wing Republicans very nicely, quietly behind the scenes, and they accomplished a lot. They accomplished just a tremendous amount of things.

Whether it is true or not, he related a story to me. I don't know, it could be true, how when they were trying to during President Kennedy's administration to break the power of the rules committee to push some civil rights legislation through. The number two person on the rules committee was a critical element in getting this thing done. They knew his personal habits. One of his habits was to consume a lot of alcohol and get drunk. They knew exactly when the vote was coming up, and they knew exactly how long it would take him to consume enough alcohol to get him out of the picture. By God, they fed him the alcohol, you know in a convivial sense. He was too drunk to go to the floor to oppose what had been proposed. That is not stuff you read about, but that is the way things often get done. There were a lot of discussions about how they could overthrow this action or that action with the Democratic Study Group coming in. At one point the guy who was to become the future speaker of the house, Mr. Wright, who was a member from Texas. Mr. Wright came in, and I was sitting there. He pointed to me and said, "Who is that son of a bitch in the back. Get him out of here." Thompson said, "No, no, he is okay. He is a congressional fellow. Whatever you are going to do won't appear for a few years later." I was able to stay. Part of my job in staying was to know what drinks which congressmen liked. Indeed my job when they came in in the afternoon and put their feet up schmoozing, was to know what drinks to make for them. It was part of my job, and a very important part of the job to keep things going. I knew where to order the liquor from, Gandells. I learned from Thompson how to make things go.

We were doing stuff on Vietnam, Cambodia. I wrote something for him I thought was pretty good, he wanted some statements, I forgot what he wanted to say. I wrote it pretty well. This was a little before 12:00 or 12:30. He looked at it and said, "This is great. I am taking it with me." I said, "You can't, Congressman." "What do you mean I can't?" I said, "I have got to check it with the State Department. I have got to make certain. I have got to get it through several..." He said, "Give me that. It is fact. If I say it on the floor, it is fact. Forget about checking with anybody." So he took it. I think it was pretty accurate. Some of my training came through, you have got to check the facts. You just can't run with it. You have got to put it through several people to see what the story is. The other thing which I found quite amusing while being up on the Hill, was that in the bureaucracy in the USIA or in State, when I was working there and called people, sometimes they would give you the time of day; more often they wouldn't. When I was calling from the Hill saying this is Wilson calling from Congressman Thompson's office, they jumped to. I mean they didn't know who I was, but by God, I was calling from the Hill. I could get anything I wanted. One of the things I don't think many members of congress realize is if they would get off of the Hill and go to the agency they are interested in regulating or interested in and walk around, they would accomplish a hell of a lot. People would be not scared but impressed. I mean I had access to people at the assistant secretary of state level I would never have access to. I didn't have to go through H or anything like that. I'd just go straight. That was very nice. I was just a little pusher.

Unfortunately Thompson came to a not terribly good demise. He got caught up in the Abscam scandals, which was claiming that he had taken money. He got in with some other people from New Jersey, took money to facilitate certain things from some FBI agents posing as Arab sheiks. I don't know, it is very difficult. You can argue it both ways. They relied on an informant who had been a criminal, an informant who was a criminal. People relied on his testimony as being accurate. They have Congressman Thompson among others on tape at a Georgetown townhouse refusing to accept money that was offered to them. On tape he is refusing to accept money. But the person who is offering it to him claimed he took it later, and this was the former criminal. But no one ever found the money. However, they believed this criminal and not the congressman. I mean you know, the basic question was what the hell was he doing in this townhouse in Georgetown in the first place if he wasn't up to something no good. But literally I sat in his personal office for almost seven months, and only twice during that time did he ever ask me to leave. If something had been going on, I might have been aware of it. I think when he asked me to leave, I think he had some loving on the side. Anyway, before he was actually convicted, while it was on appeal, I was by that time in Geneva, and he came over for an ILO meeting. We went out to dinner. He swore to me that he was not involved at all. Obviously that doesn't mean anything. I was very hurt by this. I thought he was a tremendously good lawmaker. He accomplished things; he knew how to get things done. I learned from that how to work with people whose views I didn't necessarily like. You learn how to compromise. You learn how to quietly get something done, not glamour or media spotlight but you get things done. Thompson and a guy named John Brademas, and Jack Kennedy and one other congressman had all come in together in the class of '48 into the house. They made good friends, particularly Thompson, Brademas, and Kennedy. Thompson and Brademas used to take turns going to a non-existent restaurant up on K Street and sign Jack Kennedy's name. Even after he was President. The bills would come and the game would be to see who had signed his name. He didn't mind paying them. There was no problem. I think one of Thompson's bigger disappointments with Jack Kennedy was they were good friends, all the times he went to the White House, he never went in through the front door. He was always told to go to the back door. He never knew why, but he never got to go in through the front door to see President Kennedy although they were good friends. He used to say you know there are two kinds of Irishmen, "There are the lace curtain Irishman like Jack Kennedy, and then there is the pig shit Irishman like me. Maybe that is why he wouldn't let me through the front door."

Q: Well you took Russian, this is from '70...

WILSON: No I didn't take Russian. I went over, I was starting to take it, and they looked at my MLAT scores.

Q: Modern Language Aptitude Test..

WILSON: Yes, that I had taken when I had first come into the Foreign Service. They said, "Are you sure you are State Department? Are you sure you are not in the military?" I said, "Yes, I am in the State Department. I had extremely low MLATs. They said, "No we can never teach you Russian." Then USIA offered me a chance to go to the language school in Monterey. They said, "You can learn Russian." I said, "Well that didn't intrigue me too much," if they thought it was going to be that much of a problem. So instead of going to London or instead of going to Russian language school and then to Moscow, I ended up working at that Board of Examiners, BEX on a team for about six or eight months.

Q: You did this when?

WILSON: From about the fall of '71 through the spring of '72.

Q: What was your impression of how the exams were conducted and the people you were looking at?

WILSON: I thought the exams were a bit subjective but fair, particularly the oral exams where I was involved. For the most part the people we were asking to come into the Foreign Service were very well qualified. There were more men than women. Minorities were few in number. In fact, USIA had set up a minority recruitment program sponsored by the Ford Foundation. The head of personnel for the minority recruitment program kept calling me saying, "Did he pass, did he pass?" I said, "George, for God sakes, he hasn't even taken the exam yet. How can I tell you if he passed?" He said, "Well you know what we mean. We want him to pass." One disappointment that they, and this guy didn't pass, but one of the people that took the exam was an American Indian. We were all rooting for him. He passed, but he did not want to join the Foreign Service. His reason made good sense. He just took this to see how he would do. He said, "I have got more work to help my people here in the United States than I would have to do working overseas." It was an eye opener, and he was right. We appreciated that. I don't know if I mentioned, but I think, one of the other problems we found I was very unhappy with the security background investigations that took place after we had passed someone on the orals, because there was a great question about a person's sexuality, whether they were homosexual, lesbian etc. which never should come up. We had one case, we passed the woman, and she said quite openly that she had a lover, a male lover, and she was going to take him with her when she got assigned overseas. Well to security this was a no-no. Actually she said she had several male lovers. Now if this had been a male, and he talked about his love life, he would have been very proud, and the security people would have said, hey that's great. But with a female, they were very reluctant. I fought that one and I won. She got taken right afterwards but she came in at the very least. Now subsequently the exams have changed; they are much more formal. They spend a lot more time than just a half day taking orals. I think they still do all exams around the country. I know I had gone up to Boston, Chicago doing oral exams. There was always a mixture of State Department and USIA people on the panels. In my view I liked the system because we didn't care, at least I didn't care what issues. It was irrelevant, to a certain extent. They couldn't be way off the wall, but It was their demeanor, how they handled themselves was very important. Did they get flustered? Could they keep a direction straight? Could they follow a logical theme? These were some of the issues we looked for, that I looked for. It was a three person panel, and we would tell the person right afterward if they passed or not, which I think is good. Now when I was in the OIG (Office of Inspector General) a couple of years ago, they were doing an inspection of BEX. They found a lot of problems. But the way things were going if they reported this to the director general I don't know whatever happened. But they found the exams were skewed. They were not happy with the way things were going. I can't go into detail because I wasn't part of the team. I know back as far as '98 they were having a lot of trouble with the exams and the whole BEX process. When I was there certainly in the early 70's I thought it was a fair process. At one point a member of my team, a woman who I grew very fond of, she became an ambassador, Melissa Wells, and then went back to New York. She was very sharp, very smooth. There was no gender discrimination either on the team or the people who were examined.

Q: Well by '72...

WILSON: After BEX I went back to become the deputy head of the European Press Service for USIA.

Q: You did that from '72 until when?

WILSON: Until the end of '74. From the middle of '72 to the end of '74 when I left to go to Canada.

Q: At that time what did the press service do, the European press service?

WILSON: We put out a daily wireless bulletin, not only news stories but background from the U.S. government's perspective as to what was happening in different areas of foreign affairs. They wrote original stories to support U.S. foreign policy objectives for placement in the press.

Q: What would you do, look through the press, try to come up with a topic if you thought it would be appropriate?

WILSON: Well, you would listen in to the morning conference call between the State Department spokesman and the DOD spokesman and USIA, somebody in there, so you would get to the things that are going to be expected of that day. You would take a look at the hill calendar to see what hearings are coming up, what should be covered. Then you would proceed accordingly.

Q: Well now, who were your customers?

WILSON: The customers were the embassies in both western and eastern Europe. The immediate customer was the public affairs section of the embassies. Then you distributed, it was as much for the edification of the State Department officers as it was for placement in the media or just background information for the local media. Because if I can be blunt, a State Department officer overseas has to be informed as to what is going on, and the crap they get out of telegrams doesn't do it. You have to wade through it all. But the ambassador the DCM, the political section, the economic section like to read quickly what the U.S. spokesman said, a summary of the statements to see where the hell things are going. So it became a valuable tool, even if no foreign contact ever saw it, it was extraordinarily valuable for our own internal use.

Q: Did you distribute it to the various news representatives in Washington, you know, TASS, Reuters, BBC?

WILSON: No, it wasn't for distribution in the States, so we couldn't do that. But overseas you could. Forbidden by law, not policy.

Q: Yes. Did you find that in your stories and all this, you had to be kind of careful not to upset the line or whatever it was? In other words you weren't feeling free just to go out in any subject. You had to have something that really was a government position.

WILSON: Yes you had to have a government position. You had to make certain you weren't going against the government position. That is very important. How you learned that, you had your contacts in State. You read, as I said, the briefings, and you generally develop the background and knowledge in certain areas, and you use it.

Q: Well, the Vietnam War was still going on while you were doing this. Did this play much of a, was this something you were working on a lot?

WILSON: Some, but as far as the European media was concerned, by the early 70's there was little interest in the Vietnam War. There was interest in the Vietnam Paris peace talks that were going on with Le Duc Tho and Kissinger. All of that was very interesting. But then you took a lot of the statements that came out of Paris or out of Washington. That was very important stuff. But the war itself, not terribly. So let me retrogress for one moment back to Cape Town since you bring this up. In '67 during the height of the Vietnam War, USIA made a film about Vietnam. They spent at that point a couple of million dollars on it. A guy named Bruce Hirshesen made it. It showed pacification programs working very effectively, particularly in the so-called Sulon Section in the 8th district in Saigon. That was the thrust of the film. Well about two or three weeks after we got the first copy of the film, the so-called Tet offensive was launched by the Viet Cong. It was launched from among other places right in this district 8 this film was talking about where the pacification had been so successful. So I sent a cable back which upset many people back in Washington saying, I think we should withdraw this film. It took them about three weeks to respond. They responded by saying no we are not going to withdraw this film. We are going to use it. We spent enough money to make it. Each post is free to use it or not. They were ashamed to admit they had messed up. The other part of this of course, is in the middle of a war where you have real battles, they actually staged some mock battle scenes. That was not the proudest moment of the USIA. Anyway, that is a bit of the Vietnam issue. It was a bit difficult for me in being overseas and trying to explain the Vietnam War, because people were interested while I was in Cape Town. You have to tell a certain line, but I think I toed the line by avoiding the subject as much as I possibly could.

Q: Did you notice a change in how the USIA was operating with the advent of Richard Nixon who came on in '69?

WILSON: Well, the leadership of the agency passed from a guy like Leonard Marks, to someone like Frank Shakespeare who as I said earlier was very keen on getting those commies and keeping them in their place. It became very much an anti-communist type of activity. He viewed it as a cold war activity. I never did. I didn't join USIA or State Department to counter the Russians, the Soviets at that time in the cold war. Subsequently when the Berlin Wall came down, they kept talking about there is no need for an information agency now because the cold war, as a cold war vehicle it was no longer needed. I think it was much more than that. I think it countered some Soviet propaganda, Soviet activities, but it was putting forth American culture, American ideas, American music and values, much more than it was a cold war function. Though perhaps it was the cold war function that was used to get the financing out of Congress. But the information agency itself was a very strong representation of American life. I thought that was very important, to get people overseas to understand the American society, not just American movies but something that goes deeper than that. That was my view. Now obviously under this guy Frank Shakespeare, everything was anti-Soviet, anti-communist. That was a bit hard to take. I could survive that.

Q: Well then after your time with the European press service, what did you do?

WILSON: I went to Canada to become the information officer/press attachï¿½. Stupidly I left in December of '74. I got there January of '75. It was cold, God dammit. I was frozen. Everything was frozen.

Q: You were there from '75 to when?

WILSON: To January of '79.

Q: Let's talk about Canadian-American relations when you arrived.

WILSON: Pierre Trudeau was prime minister. There was a separatist movement brewing in Quebec. The central government in Canada had set upon a French language immersion program in all the English speaking provinces to try to get Canadians to speak both languages. The U.S. dollar was strong compared to the Canadian dollar. There were a few trade disputes, but Canada was still our largest single trading partner. So those issues were important. Canadian grain problems, fishing problems between the two countries were significant. But Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the dominant force, and was a major factor in the relationship. Of course, he and Richard Nixon didn't get along so well I guess. An amusing sidelight, when I got up there Nixon had just, Nixon was no longer in office in '75. I got a phone call after three of four months from the head of the USA division in the ministry of foreign service saying did I have any pictures of President Nixon. They would like them. Sure we have got a lot of pictures. I took them over to them. I sent back a cable saying, you know the Canadians liked the president so much they wanted to have his pictures. Three or four months later I had occasion to go over to the ministry of foreign affairs around lunch time. I didn't see anybody I knew, so I walked around to the back. There was a picture of Nixon on the wall. They were throwing darts at it. They would back off, and every time they would hit him, they would take it down and put up another one.

Q: Who was our ambassador in '75 to '79?

WILSON: We had a couple. When I got up there, the ambassador was, Tom Enders was there. I don't know whether he was the first one or the second one. Bill, well it will come to me. In any case,

Q: He was a career officer, Bill Porter.

WILSON: Yes, Bill Porter. I think it was Porter and then Enders.

Q: For once rather a career team.

WILSON: Yes. Porter was excellent. He used to drive around the countryside in his old van, regular plates. This is before people worried about security, not what they would do today I suppose. But he was a very straightforward, very frank ambassador. At one point we were going to have an election out west in British Columbia. He made the comment, somebody had asked him at an event that I had organized, to my horror, somebody had asked him what he thought about the election of a certain liberal person out there. He said, "It would be helpful if he were defeated." This is not the greatest thing to say. So there was a big commotion and this got picked up by several of the reporters who were the top reporters in the country there, anchormen. They were top guys. Most of the reporters in the State Department came back and they wanted us to say that he was misquoted. I said, "Frank, I will not." And my boss backed me up. "We could no longer work with these people if we say he was misquoted. We can't do that." That was a problem. Each of us said if you make us do that, we will resign on the spot. You can have my resignation. The Department backed off, and what we said ultimately was the story is without foundation. Okay, the sharpest of the political guys who was also good friends with the columnist said, "You forgot to say in these stories are without foundation." He said, "Yes, that is correct." He said, "Does that mean my good friend, that you are over a hole?" He said, "Yes." He was over a hole. But Porter was very good, a very fine ambassador. In fact, had been nominated by Kissinger to become ambassador to Saudi Arabia. There was some question as to whether he could do this, did he make a real blunder, they said. Porter said, "If you want to rebuke me, fine, but then I don't go to Saudi Arabia for you." And they needed him. He was acceptable to the Saudis. The oil crisis had passed. He went off to Saudi Arabia. He was well respected in the Foreign Service because he started out as a code clerk and he worked his way up. He was a very solid ambassador. Then we got Tom Enders who was termed by one of the political journalists who could write football, Too Tall Enders, after the Dallas tight end, Too Tall Jones. Enders was a very sharp ambassador. He and I got along very well. More importantly his wife and I got along very well. I didn't set out to do that, but his wife was very interested in contemporary and modern American art. So I became designated as the person to deal with her on art because she said, "David, I know you will tell me honestly what to do, whereas the PAO I don't trust. He is just too diplomatic. He won't tell me what he thinks." So I got to become the designated art person for Mrs. Enders. I went to Toronto and looked at all the art galleries. Not all the time, but on occasion. That was rather interesting because she was a very, a woman of very direct sentiments. She didn't hide them. She was of Italian origin, probably about 4'11", 4'10", 4'11" and he was 6'8". So it was a very interesting couple. But they got along.

Q: What was within the embassy sort of the feeling towards Trudeau at that time?

WILSON: There was a sense that he could be a mischief maker and that he was very much a Canadian nationalist, which he was. He was both, but he was not anti-American by any means. He at that time was having problems with his wife, Margaret. That caused some difficulty, particularly when she walked into my office. Our press offices were in the same building as the press club, and she mistakenly went into, she thought she was going into the press club, and she had mental and psychological problems and she came into the office. She wanted to sit down and talk all about Pierre. It was kind of an interesting time.

Q: How did you deal with this?

WILSON: With great trepidation.

Q: Everybody knew she had problems, and this was not something to either take advantage of, I mean it was something to keep under cover. I mean keep the lid on and not ...

WILSON: Sure, that's right. And by the time she came, some RCMP(Royal Canadian Mounted Police) people came right up and they were there. It was very helpful. It was interesting because our DCM at the time was a bachelor and traveling in very vaulted circles. Actually he was out on some boat parties with Margaret. You just had to be careful, and we were. Things were all right. But there were problems. One of the problems was, as I said before, agriculture. We took a very tough line. The minister of agriculture, I don't know why I remember his name, it just came to me, a guy named Whalen, was extraordinarily critical of Ambassador Enders, and called for his recall in public. Of course that wasn't to be. Meanwhile Enders was studying German from the American Institute. This was sort of known around. One of the reporters from the Canadian press came to me one day. This was really a problem for him. He said, "You know Enders is studying German; they have asked for his recall. Does that mean he is going to be kicked out?" I said, "Hell no, he is a good ambassador. If he is studying German it is probably to go to Germany because in the American Foreign Service, Germany is a more important post than Canada." Which it happened to be true. I didn't expect it would be published.

Q: It was, oh, God.

WILSON: Yes, in a modified version. It was published. It was okay. I explained to Enders, I went over to the embassy which was in another building, I went over and explained it to him. He had a big smile on his face, and he looked up at me and he said, "You know, we will just wait for an opportunity, and we'll kick the bastards in the balls." That was his operating philosophy, and we did. It was no big deal. At the time I was feeling very put upon.

Q: How about on the cultural side. I mean it is always a problem. People buy Time Magazine and Maclean's magazine. I mean, you know, if you follow it at all, Canadian affairs, as I do sort of from afar, you hear this again and again and again. I mean the cultural dominance and where the advertisements go and all that. You must have been right in the thick of it.

WILSON: Yes. I was.

Q: I mean how did you deal with it both officially and just sort of with your contacts? They must have given you a rough time?

WILSON: Well, if it was a question of advertising in a magazine, the Canadian version of Time usually did things like that, but there was also the television question. This was much more complicated, the television was much more complicated than the magazines because the Canadian cable companies were picking up American channels, and not paying for the pickup. Then they would use Canadian advertisers, put in where they wanted to. Well, we in spite of our, the Helsinki CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), where we talked about openness and free access to information, and criticized the Soviets for blocking things, we, the United States, threatened to block our own signals. I mean, this goes against everything that we stood for as a country. So the Canadians said we can't do that. I said, we can and we will. They said, we can go behind your back and still pickup the U.S. signals. This was a major problem, particularly to some of the Congressmen, Moynihan from New York who said, "What was going to happen to the signals?" This was a big problem. We attempted to block our own signals. The Canadians continued to pick it up quietly, and that part of it went away. Could you get a Canadian tax deduction for advertising on American television? No. But what the American networks did, the American stations did on the border was to lower their rates to Canadians so that it was in effect a tax deduction for the Canadians. The issue of Time Magazine was, you know, several of the American anchors were Canadian.

Q: Tom Brokaw and Morley Safer and several others.

WILSON: At one point Morley Safer came up to do a story on this, and I was helping him. We were sitting on a bench in front of parliament. He took out a lighter to light a cigarette. He said, "You see this lighter?" "Yes." He said, "That is the lighter I gave to whoever to set the village of My Lai on fire." I said, "You're kidding!" "Yes," he said, "we set that up for the television cameras." I couldn't believe it. He was very honest. The issue ultimately went away without any punitive legislation on either side, but there was just a lot of rhetoric. The Canadians never allowed tax deductions for advertising in the Canadian version of an American magazine. I believe that the Americans lowered the rates, so they were able to accomplish that. It was a major issue. It was a good substantive issue, a good fun issue to deal with. I enjoyed it anyway.

Q: Did you find in sort of your whole professional and social acquaintances, you kept having this "you are so big and we are so small" and "you have got to be more understanding of us" and all that sort of thing?

WILSON: Oh a little but not a hell of a lot. You know there was an issue in Maclean's right after I got there. A woman named Heather, I forgot her last name, wrote an article about all the American campers coming up with their campers coming up to Canada. We should toss them bombs. Subsequently, one of our better contacts in Canada became and is still the editor-in-chief of Maclean's. She is certainly not anti-American. They realize the relationship. Sometimes you have, particularly during an election period, you have to make noises about the giant to the south.

Q: I would think that being in the USIA operation, all of you would have to be very careful because in other countries, you make a remark, you know other countries don't give too much of a damn, but Canada, just the very fact that you say something about Canada can get yourself in the front pages.

WILSON: Canada was very sort of schizophrenic about the United States. It is too easy to say, well, they dislike us. They don't. We are very much like them. In fact the Canadian journalists were hired by American television networks because they are not American and can use Canadian visas and Canadian passports to get into countries like Iran where we couldn't. They made a point of wearing Canadian flag on their ass, so that they were not American. They are very proud of that fact that they are not American. As years have gone on, Canadians have built up their own culture. They have a group of seven painters who are very well known in Canada. They have their own film industry, although it is small. One of the things they are doing that irked Americans, the American film industry, many American television commercials are made in Canada because of lower rates of salary scales for the people they have to pay. They have big studios in Toronto for making these things. They still do. They are very big in films. We have, as I say, an American film festival there, Walt Disney. Walt Disney, they are very careful of their image, and we had somebody come up from Disney world, several characters including Mickey Mouse. Well Mickey Mouse lost her birth control pills. This was a major problem. We quietly figured out how to get the birth control pills. Disney would have skinned us alive if it had come out in the press that Mickey Mouse was a girl taking birth control pills.

Q: A girl in costume.

WILSON: Yes. We worked that out very quietly and very carefully. But they are very interested in American film; we did several American film festivals. And I for whatever reasons, became the wine officer of the American embassy. It wasn't just drinking wine but one of our high goals, one of our mission goals, was to open the Canadian provincial markets to American wine, particularly Ontario and Quebec, where the liquor control boards control wines that come in or not come in to the country, or what wines could be sold in the liquor control board stores. That was a major issue. We were fairly successful in opening up the Ontario liquor control board.

Q: My understanding is Canada was sort of the Tory stronghold in a way, I mean you are talking about Tories going back to the Revolutionary War. Quebec has its own ethos which is not particularly anti-American, it is anti-British at the same time. Then you have the west going all the way to British Columbia which operates on a completely different set of principles. Did you find, I would think this would prove to be a difficult country to represent.

WILSON: There were obviously strong differences. Well, the west was much more liberal, British Columbia, than Calgary and some of the other parts of the west, all the grain and oil areas of the west. We had a consul general in Quebec City named Terry McNamara. Right after the votes that gave the Parti Quebecois, the PQ power in Quebec province, there was big talk about secession. Quebec was going to secede and become a country unto itself. Well the press talked to McNamara, and they quoted him as saying, "Well it could be the sixth largest country going, and we would be pleased to have a military alliance with Quebec." Of course it was not U.S. policy, and Terry ultimately denied saying this. Tom Enders and I discussed that in Enders' office We talked. Enders liked Terry McNamara.

Q: Well Terry is a feisty guy.

WILSON: Yes, he is a good guy. I like Terry. We talked and we talked to Terry by phone. We put out a statement saying this was completely untrue. Terry had never said this. As we were walking out of the office, Enders looked up at me with a big wink and said, "But do we know he didn't say it?" Much more was said between Tom and me, but we knew he had said it. We certainly protected him. At the same time, some of the maritime provinces were very upset. I happened to be in the library one day at lunch time, and a call came through from the premier of Nova Scotia himself. I forget who it was. "Is this the information officer?" "Yes." He told me who he was and he said, "Can you tell me what procedures one must follow in order to become a state of the United States?" Of course, I said, sure I will get back to him. Before I got back to him, I wanted to make sure it really was the premier. This required some instant political reporting. Then I had to find out what the hell you had to do to become a state.

Q: That isn't something exactly on the tip of our tongue.

WILSON: The answer is there is no fixed procedure. There is nothing set out in the Constitution. You can state how other states have become states and how Congress votes them in, but there no fixed rules. But he was serious. As soon as Quebec, the Parti Quebecois, came in with an independence policy in Quebec, he was concerned about breaking off from western Canada. This is where information work, public affairs work becomes really political. That was a very political type of thing.

Q: Oh, God, yes.

WILSON: We had a consul general, a lovable guy but not overly intelligent, a guy named Ron Gaiter. Again his offices were separated from mine.

Q: Ron Gaiter, I knew him vaguely.

WILSON: And he called me one day and says could he come see me? "Yes." I said, "What's up, Ron?" "I can't talk about it on the phone, but before I get there, I need to know is Alexander Solzhenitsyn a member of the communist party." I could check that out pretty easily. Ron came up the hill and we talked. He said, "This is very confidential, but as you know Solzhenitsyn is in Canada." I knew that vaguely. He said, " Solzhenitsyn has applied for a visa to go to the United States, and is he a member of the communist party?" I said, "Yes, he is Ron. Any writer who has done any work has to be a member of the communist party." He said, "Well I can't give him a visa." I said, "Why? For God sakes he has been invited to address a joint session of Congress. I don't know what you have got to do but call somebody on a secure line. Do what you have to but for God sakes you have got to get him a visa." Ultimately he did. But I mean he was serious. The rules say that...

Q: Well ,once in awhile we get hoisted on that petard. I am an old consular officer, and I have seen this, where people just don't use their common sense.

WILSON: Exactly. But you said a word that I think pervades my time in the Foreign Service. I am a strong believer in it. Common sense. You have rules. They are not made to be broken, but they are made to be applied with common sense. That is very important in dealing with the Foreign Service. Another thing that not too many people do in the Foreign Service is learn to take individual responsibility. It is easy to hide behind the bureaucracy. In our later conversation I learned the boss of USIA, Charles Z. Wick, who was a son-of-a-bitch. He had one credo. This was who is responsible? I want to know the name of the individual that is responsible. I don't want to be told it is a bureaucracy. I want to know the name of the individual. That is very important, and I have tried to follow that rule. It's critical. Who is responsible, for good as well as bad, I mean who is responsible.

Q: Well did you get involved any other way with the Quebec separation movement? I mean was this sort of a minefield that one had to be very careful about?

WILSON: Yes. We did not, in our role, we did not get involved in that issue at all. Aside from going to Quebec City as a tourist or going to Montreal to see some baseball games, or going into Quebec province to eat, we stayed very much away from that issue. Tom Enders though, that issue didn't worry him. He figured the Canadians would take care of it themselves. What he was concerned about, and what he found he was helpless to do anything about was the relationships between Canadian provinces and American states. Because by natural affinity and geographic affinity, they were having to do a lot of things together. Enders was furious. He decreed that nobody in the States should have any dealings with Canada that he was unaware of.

Q: This is sort of like saying sun stand thou still, you know.

WILSON: He could do that. After this decree went out and State Department certainly approved of it, you saw in the paper that the prime ministers of Quebec and Ontario were meeting with the governors from Vermont and New York to discuss signage on the roads going up and down. He was fit to be tied. He said, "I thought that this was not supposed to happen." "Mr. Ambassador, there is not a thing anybody could do about it." The meeting was going to happen. But it was frustrating, because if you are supposed to represent U.S. interests, you want to know about this. But there was no physical human way of controlling it. Enders had to learn that that was the case. But we did not get involved really in the Quebec separatist issue, we did not get involved on the Quebec side of the separatist issue. We reported, of course, what happened in parliament, what Trudeau was saying, what his advisors were saying. But we didn't get involved in that. Now one of the things that I did in Canada was to take some of the magazines USIA produced which we were distributing free, and put them on sale. Now this caused some problems back in Washington. I got it cleared through the general counsel's office. My philosophy was if these magazines were any good, people will use some of their disposable income to purchase them if they have any meaning to them. If they don't, big deal. The real issue was a magazine called Problems of Communism.

Q: Excellent.

WILSON: A very well done scholarly magazine. We put that one at a price that was not very much, I think it was ten dollars a year for four issues. Ten Canadian dollars versus U.S. I got a call from someone on Trudeau's staff saying we got your notice. We are not going to pay for that. You are still going to give it to the prime minister. I said, "No. If you want it, you have got to pay for it." There was hemming and hawing, and they paid for it. Washington was very upset, because initially our 600 distribution went down to about a little over 300. But inside of a year it was back up to about 450, and these were honestly 450 people who really wanted the magazine. The economic impact wasn't nearly so successful, but people bought it. It was a good experiment, only in Canada. I suspected we should have done it in other parts of the world, but no one wanted to take the risk. But it was a very important operation, and I got approval from the general counsel's office, and we did it. We used an American firm based in Toronto for distribution. The magazines were mailed to them; they mailed them out. We had cleaned the ads. We didn't have to worry about the distribution anymore. It was a very interesting experiment. I enjoyed setting it up; I enjoyed seeing that it worked, and found we had people who really cared about the product to buy it.

Q: Well this of course has been done. I know we used to give away books in the Arab world, but give them to book stores and have them sell them. It worked much better because otherwise people, if it is a freebie, it sort of gets in the way.

WILSON: We were still doing that several years ago when I was involved in the Bureau of education and cultural affairs. We were giving books to people and letting them sell them in Africa and Latin America, but that's another issue. Let me just back up. After my Hill experience, and after not getting into the language program, I did work a year, and I am sorry I forgot about that, at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). This was before I went to work in the European press office. I was there at a time just at the signing of the SALT I agreement. That was a very stimulating period as far as I was concerned.

Q: What were you doing?

WILSON: I was the, the title was press officer. In fact there were three people there, myself, and a woman, and a deputy head of the office, a guy named Ralph Smith, and this fellow Dave Dorgiss. He was dealing with bigwigs. But he again taught me a very good lesson on bureaucracy. When I first came there he said, "Young man, I want you to remember one thing. I want you to protect my tail. If you protect me particularly vis a vis the people above me so I don't look bad, I don't make any mistakes, I will take good care of you in your ratings." A very simple statement. Just very good. We got the SALT I agreement signed. I learned there was a leak of something on the U.S. position. Of course, there was a leak about the U.S. fallback position. This just brought the FBI over, a lot of questions. With that, of course, the first place they look is public affairs. Obviously public affairs is the last place somebody is going to leak something, but it is the first place you look. They weren't concerned so much about the U.S. position, presenting it to the Soviets, but they were concerned about the damn fallback position, because that hadn't been presented to the Soviets. That kind of blew over, and the agreements were signed. Then they were talking about what was going on next. The deputy head of the office had a good sense of humor, and he decided that the next talks, and he talked to somebody in the graphics design department, and he said, "The next talk should be called the 'follow on arms restriction talks'." FART. He had some letterhead made up. This is because when they did the SALT they were warned that people were just going to be using that, and indeed they were. There were some cartoons with salt, somebody putting salt on a bird's tail, etc. But the follow-on arms restriction talks, I have some of the letterhead stationery, never got used. That became START. But it was a good group of people to work with. The agency (ACDA) was small. You worked with people in State, Harriman was about. It was just a good time.

Q: Well, I think this is a good place to stop now. We will pick this up in '79. Where did you go?

WILSON: Switzerland, Geneva.

Q: We will pick it up in Switzerland, Geneva then, '79.

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Today is February 16, 2001. David, you are off to Geneva in 1979.

WILSON: Correct.

Q: How long were you there?

WILSON: Five and a half years.

Q: So we are talking almost '86?

WILSON: No, '84. Because I was there for almost all of '79, '80, '81, '82, '83, through August of '84.

Q: What were you doing there then?

WILSON: I started out as the deputy public affairs counselor. I ended up as the public affairs counselor. I could have stayed longer had I wanted to. We will get into that. I was in Ottawa, and I had been trying to get a transfer out. They said, "No there is no way possible." So I had just renewed my housing lease in Ottawa in November. I got a call from Washington in December saying we need you to go to Geneva immediately. I was a little put out, because it was "no, you can't leave, you certainly can't leave mid-cycle." But they had an emergency opening. The person who had the job I was to go into had just quit, and they needed somebody because they had the arms control talks going on, and the PAO needed help. I had worked in the arms control agency, so they thought that was pretty significant, and they wanted me over there. So I pulled my family out in mid-January, and we came by New York and went to Geneva directly.

Q: Well what was the status of talks when you got there in January of 1979?

WILSON: Well the arms talks hadn't done much. They were just sort of kicking around. But there were a lot of other side talks that were going on at the UN in Geneva, particularly one dealing with UNCTAD, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, to help the developing countries. They had a major UNCTAD meeting, and I being very enthusiastic plunged right into it the day after I got there. I was very excited; we were going to achieve something. We had the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal there. The New York Times gentleman said, "Relax, nothing is going to happen." I said, "We are on the verge of something great." We stayed up, a couple of all-nighters. It was very exciting. I started to talk to some of the colleagues around me, and one was a lady from the State Department legal office. I said, "Oh what are you doing here?" She said, "Well, we have to be around in case they reach an agreement." "Can't they just send it back to you?" "No, not really, we need to be here." So the talks went on for three or four days, crisis marathon state. Nothing happened. By the time I left, every other year these same talks went on and nothing happened. Nothing still happens, but it was exciting the first time.

Q: Well tell me, did you find, you are talking about there is a whole series of talks that were going on, people who were living or sent there by the Soviets or Americans, whoever. I mean there must have grown up sort of a Geneva culture.

WILSON: Absolutely.

Q: Could you talk a bit about it?

WILSON: Sure. The Geneva culture was if you were attending a conference, and I am going to exclude arms control for a moment. We will get back to that. If you are attending a conference, the sessions usually begin three or four o'clock in the afternoon. They break for supper, and then they go into the evening. Now there was one point a couple of years into my tour where they were doing again another one of these UNCTAD conferences to help the developing nations. The developing nations always said, if you will just take half of the budget you developed countries are spending on arms and give to us as developing nations, the world will be a safer place for democracy. These talks always went on to three or four o'clock in the morning. One day the UN interpreters, these are the ones who do the simultaneous interpretation, went to the head of the conference, the president of the conference and said, "Look, we are tired. We are not going to stay up and do interpreting past midnight." The head of the conference took great umbrage at this and said, "We don't need you." Midnight came. The interpreters went. The conference went on for about 20 minutes and it fell into total disarray like a Tower of Babel. Nobody could understand anybody else. It was humorous, it was great. Interpreters are a very important part of UN procedure, any international procedure, and they are well paid.

Q: Well what was the reason for this going on past midnight?

WILSON: It became part of the culture. They start late in the afternoon because they had been working late the preceding night so they sleep in. They get up and sort of have a late breakfast or lunch, and they begin their talks about three or four in the afternoon. That's the way it works. Not all meetings obviously, but certainly the UNCTAD meeting was that way. Some of the CCD, the Committee on Disarmament was that way. From a working perspective it was very exciting because we always had a lot of political appointees come in to head up these various delegations from the United States perspective. It was fun to deal with them and talk with them. They would come in, the congress would begin on a Monday, they would come in on Saturday night or more likely a Sunday afternoon or Sunday morning, and they would have a big meeting on Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening and state what the U.S. position was. We all would nod and say yes, yes, yes. Then they would begin their round of meetings, and not much usually resulted from them, but they had a good time. We had a good time at least at first. There was one conference dealing with hunger. Our ambassador who was a good democratic political appointee at the time, was a guy named Bill Vanden Heuvel, who claimed he had worked with the old predecessor of the CIA. He was a good guy. A liberal Democrat, he had been a Congressman from the silk stocking district of New York. His claim to fame was to sit between Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy to keep them apart from each other, keep them from talking to each other. Anyway, there were two things I learned from him. I learned several things from him. One when he was talking about Mrs. Carter coming over, I think. We were discussing her coming over for whatever meeting it was going to be. We were talking about getting all the other ambassadors on board. I said, "Mr. Ambassador, what does it matter what these other countries think or do?" Then he gave me a lecture on the importance of multilateral diplomacy. It was a good lesson on how it works. But when we had the food conference, he implored the delegation that came in from Washington, I forget who headed it up, he said, "Please may I ask you all delegates stand up. Please, you are Americans. While you are at this conference, don't go to all these good restaurants in Geneva and eat yourselves sick. It doesn't look good if you are discussing food and hunger, and going to and eating at all these good restaurants." It was a good point. It was a very good point. Not that anyone would listen to him, but it was a good point.

Q: Well, what was our setup there? Were you sort of assistant and then finally PAO for all the various...

WILSON: Yes, any of the delegations that came in. The PAO could take his choice of any of the delegations that he wanted to service, and I serviced others. Sometimes we would trade off, and we would try to put out statements for the people. For the leaders of the delegations, we would try to get them interviews with the various media, not only American media but international media as well. That is what it consisted of. It was a major media operation.

Q: Well during the five years you were there, I mean did the Swiss play much of a role or were they just the hosts?

WILSON: They were the hosts, but in order to achieve our objectives with people coming in and out at airports, etc., we found it very useful to be good to the Swiss, very nice to the Swiss. The Swiss often resented foreigners, but they enjoy living off the proceeds of foreigners. So we got along with the chief of protocol and with his assistants. We made sure we worked things out with them, very important. One of the problems that we faced, of course, was the relationship between the U.S. mission to the UN in Geneva and the bilateral embassy in Bern, and the relationships between ambassadors, particularly when important figures came in. Who was to greet them? Which ambassador went out to the airplane, walked at the end of the tarmac. It was a very touchy subject, and we learned to deal with that. The underlings kind of laughed about it, but the ambassadors took it very seriously.

Q: Well did you get together with the PAO in Bern and sort of, you know, sit there and figure out how are you going to deal with these egos?

WILSON: Yes. for example, one of the things we did was once a year, we would invite the ambassador form Bern to come and address the American club, at one of the big hotels in Geneva. That always made her feel good. But the real thrust of the problem reached a boiling point when somebody like the Secretary of State came or the Vice President came or the President came in. If the President did go through Geneva, who is the first guy to greet him, or in this case, guy or woman? Then we ran into another problem. One of the ambassadors, a democratic appointee ambassador, a guy named Marvin Warner from Ohio, I think Cincinnati, was a bachelor, as was at the time our ambassador Vanden Heuvel. They used to compete for various things, but right in the middle of all this, Ambassador Warner was stopped by the Swiss police from bringing a young woman to an official Swiss government dinner in Bern. The Swiss police told us quietly this is a known prostitute. We cannot have her coming in to sit with the President of Switzerland, etc. Warner was very indignant. He was going to make a diplomatic incident of it. I counseled our ambassador to go and talk to him. Tell Marvin Warner to call it off. He didn't, but the State Department ultimately told him to cool it, so ultimately he cooled it. When he went back, when his ambassadorship ended or he was recalled, he ended up going to jail in the United States for some fraud or some of these doings. He was not the most pleasant character to deal with, but those things happen in any situation.

Q: Of course Switzerland is considered a cozy spot to send somebody who gives money, but you don't want to put an awful lot of trust in their ability.

WILSON: Yes, in the bilateral relationship. The problem though for the ambassador in Geneva, our ambassador, is if you got an activist in there, and we had one career guy who was very activist.

Q: Who was that?

WILSON: Jerry Hellman. He wanted to follow the issues, and he knew the issues. He wanted to get involved with the delegations on all the issues. Of course the delegations coming out of Washington, you know, what the hell does this guy know? He doesn't know anything; keep him out. But he did know something. It was a major problem because our ambassador felt he had nothing to do unless he dealt with these delegations. He was just a housekeeper. Hellman really got involved. Now one of our other ambassadors, a political ambassador, a guy named Jeff Swaebe, who then went on to become ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium in Brussels, happened to have been a good friend of the President. At one point, this is a true story, the director of the Arms Control Disarmament Agency came out for some talks. In an obligatory way, he had to "brief" the sitting U.S. ambassador. He sort of went in and did it with a lick and a promise, as if to say you dumb bastard, you don't know what the hell I am talking about do you? He didn't say that obviously but that was his attitude. Well, this got back to the President, and the director of the Arms Control Agency was not long for this world as director of the Arms Control Agency. I mean, he didn't take this ambassador seriously. That was a major mistake. He belittled him; he downgraded him, and paid the price. This guy had a lot of influence with the White House, and the reason he had influence with the White House was his property in California was contiguous with the Reagan property in California, and it was contiguous with the property of a guy named Charlie Wick. The wives used to carpool, so the wives were very close. Jeff Swaebe who had been with Florsheim shoes and then with the major department stores, he had been head of the major department stores, put together a consortium of retailers to refurbish the White House when Ronald Reagan came in. This was for the White House. This wasn't for Ronald Reagan to take home afterwards as Clinton seems to have done. So he had a certain amount of influence with President Reagan, and certainly with Charlie Wick who had a lot of influence with President Reagan. So if you came out, you had to learn very quickly that you could not just slough off the ambassador to the commission in Geneva. You couldn't just ignore him, or at least you shouldn't just ignore him.

Q: How did you find your role because with the exception of Hellman, most of your ambassadors and others were political appointees, and sort of caretaking things? I would have thought that, I mean, when you are acting as a spokesperson for the various delegations that come out, at the same time you are working for the ambassador. I would think this would get kind of tricky.

WILSON: There was another political appointee, a guy named Gerald Carmen who now runs Carmen Associates. He had a tremendously lousy personality. He had been a used car parts dealer in New Hampshire. He had helped Reagan overcome a deficit. They brought him down to Washington and made him head of the General Services Administration (GSA). After about a year and a half, I don't know how this came to his attention, but he suddenly learned that several of the wives, particularly Wayne French Smith's the attorney general and a couple of the other wives, were using government cars to go shopping and do things like this. He started to crack down on that. Apparently some people got to the White House and said, get him out of there. Get him out of the GSA. So they did, and they sent him to Geneva. He was a decent guy, he really was, but he had no personality. At one point, my offices were right down on the ground floor and he had to take the elevator, or anybody did, to get upstairs where his office is and the executive offices were. One day I was standing at the elevator when he came in and he said, "What are you doing right now? Tell me what you are working on." I told him. He said, "You know, you are damn lucky." I said, "What do you mean, Mr. Ambassador?" He said, "I don't know what I am doing. I haven't got anything to do. You are lucky to have something to do." We got off to a good relationship. He tried to get me to stay on. He wanted me to stay on past the time I was there. I had already stayed on. He said, "In your Foreign Service culture, is it true you can't leave unless I give you permission to leave?" I said, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador that is correct." He said, "Is it also true that no successor can come in unless I approve of this successor." I said, "Yes, that is correct, Mr. Ambassador." He said, "Well you tell Washington that I don't approve of your successor no matter who it is. You can't leave." So we sat back for a little while. Meanwhile, this is true. This shows you how the bureaucracy works. Charlie Wick who was then director of USIA, had then come out to Geneva. He had known me, and he wanted me to come back and break my tour six or eight months early to head up, become the first program director, for something called Worldnet, which was USIA's new innovative television service. I was a little hesitant, but he wanted me to do that. I said, "Well I have got two kids in school. I really can't pull them out." He said, "Well, they can stay in Geneva until the cycle is over." "Yes, but the housing allowance stops and the school allowance stops. I really can't do it." They said, "Well, we will see about that." The USIA person said, "Well if Charlie Wick wants you back here, you have got to come back." Well I also discovered, there was a certain regulation at USIA that said I could not come back and get per diem on a temporary assignment in Washington if I were going to be assigned to Washington afterwards. So we went back and forth on this for awhile. Wick said he wanted me back in May to deal with a NATO 25th anniversary meeting or whatever it was, to help do that one, because I had dealt with arms control stuff, and he wanted me to deal with NATO. That's fine. I talked to the personnel people, and they said, "You know you really can't get per diem, and we really can't continue your housing in Geneva once you leave." So I remembered what the ambassador said to me, and I said, "Well you know," and by that time my successor had been named. I said, "Well you know the ambassador doesn't want to accept Chris as my replacement. Moreover he doesn't want me to leave, and he won't approve my leaving." There was dead silence on the other end. They said, "Well do you think you can convince him?" I said, "I don't know; I'll talk to him, but do you think you could find a way to keep my wife and kids here while I go back and on TDY and to pay me my full per diem while I am in Washington." Within an hour, the director of personnel called me herself and said, "We have found a way to meet all of your requests. Do you think you can get the ambassador to let you go?" Well I knew I could because he told me if I wanted to go I could. I said, "Well I will get back to you in a week." Which I did. I told them yes, I found a way to do this. The ambassador will let me go. But it is a good example of how you can deal with the bureaucracy. You need to deal with it, you need to know where you want to go, and you need to be strong in your own interpretation of regulations, and you need to have something to, not hold over their heads, but something that they want that you can provide. That worked extraordinarily well.

Q: Well tell me, while you were there, what were the hot-bellied things that were going on?

WILSON: I became PAO when the USIA director fired the former PAO because he spent a lot of time on a boat, and the ambassador noticed this, that he would come in from lunch after a two or three hour lunch. The ambassador would notice this. So I presume, and I don't know for a fact, that the ambassador just called his friend, the director of USIA and said, "Just get his guy out of here." When this happened, I happened to be in Paris for a conference. I got back and the ambassador called me up and said, "Well, now that your old boss is gone," because I had not been happy with the fact that they had a USIA car. They really didn't need one, and the guy was using it to go to and from his boat. He said, "Well now that Hank is gone, what are you going to do about the car?" I said, "Well we have got the car. I can't get rid of it, Mr. Ambassador, but I will use it to go to and from work. I will not use it as my predecessor did." He said, "You know, now that you are the head honcho, you have got to learn to step back, take your hands off the operation and direct it rather than run it personally." It was a good lesson. How to learn to run an operation. Once I became head, the two things which I was most intimately and directly involved were the arms control talks, the START talks, the INF talks, and the Tokyo round of the trade talks. Those were extraordinarily significant, and it required personnel developing a good relationship with several members of each delegation, and importantly, getting the heads of the delegations to trust me. Very critical, and particularly on the arms talks, there was a lot of media around. We had maybe 15 or 20 people around each week coming in from out of town to try to deal with these issues. And it was up to me to judge the people. If I recommended that an ambassador do an interview, they would do it. If not, they wouldn't. But I had to be very careful, because if any of the people whom I recommended broke our agreement, I would have had my head handed to me.

Q: When you say broke the agreement, what was this?

WILSON: Well, the conditions of our interview, by naming the person with whom they were speaking or by not writing the thing up properly. So this became very sensitive. I had to be involved in the negotiations, where things are going. this is when we were going to station INF missiles in Germany. This is when Willy Brandt took a toy airplane and threw it at one of his opponents in the Bundestag. We were using our Worldnet operation to reach other countries in Europe and convince them to allow the stationing of U.S. missiles on their territory. A very sensitive area. Then the START talks, which were much wider ranged and were headed by a guy named Rowny.

Q: Yes, General Ed Rowny.

WILSON: The missile talks were headed by Paul Nitze. The START talks were less imminent so they were less emphasis on this, but Rowny became jealous of Nitze. He was getting all the press attention. So Rowny wanted some press attention. But then the relationship between Rowny and Nitze deteriorated markedly. For example, and this is fact, both arms control ambassadors periodically went to Brussels to brief the NATO allies. They would fly in a military plane. Nitze was always very precise and very on time. Rowny knew that being late was anathema to Nitze. Nitze hated that. So most of the time when they flew up together, Rowny either deliberately or because of his nature would always end up at the airport late, and the plane had to wait for him. This would drive Nitze crazy. It would drive him absolutely up the walls. One of the more interesting times I had with them, and I was much closer to Nitze and the intermediate nuclear force, the INF delegation than I was to the START talks. Our ambassador to the INF talks, Paul Nitze, and the Soviet ambassador, Kvitsinsky, decided to talk a walk in the woods because I think each of them felt they really couldn't trust their own people, who may be bugging their conversations, so they decided to go for a walk in the woods, literally. When they came back from that walk in the woods, they had reached an agreement as to how we could conclude the INF talks. They really had. This was then sent back to Washington by Ambassador Nitze. I don't know how the Soviet side worked, but you have to remember on the U.S. side, it was a conglomeration of interests. You had the Arms Control Agency, in which Nitze worked. You had the White House; you had the NSC; you had the joint chiefs, and they all had their own lines of communication. Everything went back with their own spin on it. This is, of course, what Nitze wanted to avoid. He wanted to get his stuff back first. The initial reaction by a guy named Allen who was National Security Advisor to President Reagan was extremely positive. Hey, this is really a good basis for concluding agreements. What no one realized, this was in August, was that a little man over in the Pentagon, a political appointee named Richard Perle, was on vacation. He had been on vacation in France. When he came back the position in Washington changed.

Q: He was known as the prince of darkness. He hated the Soviet Union.

WILSON: Correct. So Richard Perle is on vacation in France. He likes to cook and eat. He came back and he saw this agreement. Then some of the defense contractors got to him, and after about six or seven weeks, the agreement was scuttled. We wanted to say the Soviets scuttled it, but in fact we really did. But this really opened up a whole area for responsible journalists, what the hell is going on. This is where I earned my money, because I was able to give a few journalists, these were with one exception, someone form the BBC, I took them out and showed them where the walk took place. I got them deep background briefings with Ambassador Nitze. They helped get our position our, at least the position Nitze had negotiated. Now ultimately that particular walk in the woods agreement was rejected, and in talking to Ambassador Nitze a year or so later, he said that he had made a big mistake. I said, "What was that, Mr. Ambassador?" He said, "Well I should have realized that the agreement eliminated an entire class of weapons." Which is ultimately what happened. He said, "What I did not realize is that by eliminating an entire class of weapons, instead of saying reducing this to about 100 or so, I got all the defense contractors and the sub-contractors against the agreement. If I had left in 100 or so weapons, they would have been happy. It probably would have gone through." This is speculation after the fact, but it was a very interesting point because ultimately about four years later, the agreement was put into place almost as it was negotiated five years earlier.

Q: David, you were...

WILSON: We were talking about getting briefings, reporters briefings on this walk in the woods. We had to be very careful on whom we got the briefing for, because we recommended it. If I recommended it, Ambassador Nitze would do it. And fortunately, just by good luck, no one ever crossed us up. I was very pleased about that. You always put your neck on the line when you do those things. This worked very well. Now the other thing that developed during all the arms talks, was that I would often bring both to Ambassador Nitze and Ambassador Ryan, bring in the BBC correspondent in Geneva. Again it would be on background. But the BBC correspondent was always very well informed as to what was going on, and I got to know him. I said to him, "How do you keep up on all this?" He said, "Well, to be very frank, I get a weekly briefing from the foreign office when I am back in London." I said, "Oh that is very interesting." Then in my own mind I related this back to VOA, Voice of America being very pristine, wanting to have nothing to do with the State Department, with USIA saying we are an independent news gathering organization. Now the BBC reputation worldwide is still very sterling. VOA is much less so in spite of VOA's insistence they wanted no special briefings, no special contact, just like everyone else. The BBC on the other hand got weekly briefings from the foreign ministry on whatever subjects they needed. They didn't violate the confidence, and they still were respected as an objective international news source. A rather interesting little sidelight.

Q: I'd like to go back to the walk in the woods thing. In a way, I would think that you would be playing a very complicated game of chess in this briefing . Your knees had been cut from under you by Richard Perle. By the conservatives, the contractors.

WILSON: Yes, we didn't know precisely who. We could suspect.

Q: In a way, if you are telling the press on deep background that you really came up with what appeared to be a viable thing, and it had been shot down by forces in the United States.

WILSON: Well, we didn't say that last part.

Q: Was this left unsaid?

WILSON: It was left unsaid. We presented what the U.S. position was, and we tried to frame it is such a way that the responsibility for the breakdown of these negotiations lay with the Soviets.

Q: I mean, I assume the Soviets were doing the same thing.

WILSON: Probably, but much less effectively obviously.

Q: Yes. Did you have much chance after these meetings of getting together with the Soviet spokesperson?

WILSON: Never got together with the Soviet spokesperson. One of the people who we were very close to in all of these talks was a reporter named Strobe Talbott who was a good friend of Nitze's, extremely reliable. A couple of times when we arranged for our delegation and the Soviet delegation to take a little trip down Lake Geneva, I had to contact the Soviets, and we brought Strobe along. Strobe never broke a confidence. He was very good about that. He knew the subject. He covered the Soviet Union, covered Russia. He was very good, a very reliable person. I think he did some writing well after the fact.

Q: What about the press? Can you kind of give your feeling earned after almost five years there, not just the American press, but the other press, about how things came out, or how you dealt with them or their knowledge or whatever.

WILSON: The people who were based in Geneva for various news gathering organizations around the world were very knowledgeable in the details of whatever is going on. They would normally report back on a regular basis. The stuff they would report back on would not garner headlines. It was just stuff that would fill the back pages. Whenever a major conference was taking place, these same organizations would send in "their big guns form home base." That was always a slight problem for the locals who felt ignored or shut out. It was a problem.

Q: Would they get the stories wrong too, the big guns?

WILSON: No, not if they checked with their local guys as to what the background was. They didn't care about the details. The cared about the global impression, the big picture. They wouldn't get the stories wrong. They wouldn't necessarily have all the subtle details and the nuances. The local guys did.

Q: I would have thought particularly in some of these disarmament conferences, it would be very difficult to deal. You know, I mean we are talking about almost points of theology practically. How much throw weight, how much this, that, and things moved at a glacial pace anyway. Wasn't it hard not to say, well you heard my briefing last week, and it is the same this week or something like that?

WILSON: No, because they wouldn't report on a daily basis. They would report when something was happening. You know, the big thing with the arms talks, the arms control talks. Then you had the Committee on the Conference on Disarmament, CCD or the CD. There was the question about maneuvering. What do you do about the Chinese? How do you deal with this little issue or that little issue? That would be for a period of maybe six or eight weeks once a year. Then they would go away and they would come back and take up where they left off on the arms control side. The other side of the real interesting press work or media work was the trade talks. Most of the reporters did not want to get involved in the trade issue. Obviously the guy from the Wall Street Journal did. There were people from the New York Times that did, but the New York Times when they really got going would send in, they had a permanent person, but when they really got interested in something they would send in someone who really knew the subject to give a little more global perspective. The trade talks were very important, the Tokyo round trade talks. I learned more than I ever, I didn't know much about it to begin with, but I learned very quickly. It is my background in these trade talks for about three years that ultimately got me the PAO job at the U.S. mission to the European Community in Brussels, because I knew the players, and I knew the issues. So the trade talks were very significant, though people didn't pay much attention to them because a lot of special interests were involved, cocoa interests, lumber interests. Our delegation was always filled with people from the various special interest groups. The trade talks became more over a period of time, much more significant to what we were doing than even the nuclear talks, except the nuclear talks could save us from being killed, and trade talks save us from going broke.

Q: What about the other delegations? Particularly, I think of the French, and maybe the Germans, particularly, when you get into trade talks. The French pursue their interest much more than anyone else.

WILSON: Sure, but you mention two countries that happened to be members of the European Community at the time, and the European Community had a delegation in Geneva. Whenever they dealt with trade issues, it was the European Community spokesman, or the European Community position that was critical. Now the French and the Germans obviously made their issues known within the European Community, and they helped shape the European Community position, but their role in the actual negotiation was less significant as individual countries because of the European Community and the European Union then.

Q: Well, I would have thought particularly at that period, France was sort of the major driving force in the European Union, Germany happily letting France take the lead, but basically was fine but basically a protectionist thrust, correct me if I am wrong, in agriculture and culture.

WILSON: Agriculture was very significant for the French. Culture was not really an issue in the talks as such, except when it came in to motion pictures, and then it became...

Q: I was going to say motion pictures.

WILSON: Television became a significant issue. Agriculture is still a major issue. Nothing has been solved in that. The U.S. position in all this is not always that clear. Fortunately the U.S. delegation was always headed by someone from the U.S. Trade Representative's office. While that is a bureaucracy, it is a very small bureaucracy, less than 200 people. You could deal with them very well. It was in this sense that you could see how over the years the State Department's position on economic affairs had become eroded. State had absolutely no, I mean they had a member as part of the delegation, but they weren't significant in any way. Commerce was even more significant than State. Agriculture was more significant than State. But USTR kept the whole thing going and the whole thing together and they did an extraordinarily good job.

Q: Well did you find, say when USTR came out, a deputy?

WILSON: They have someone there permanently, a permanent ambassador.

Q: Well you acted as spokesman for this group too?

WILSON: Yes.

Q: How did you find these various delegations and I imagine each one had again its own way of doing things and all this? I would think that as you were running around you would be switching hats and outlooks, methods of working all the time.

WILSON: Well, it required learning a new culture, a new set of terms because I really had not been steeped in trade. I did that. But, it is interesting that you should mention that because that solved sort of a State Department personnel dilemma. We had been asking, when I became PAO, to get a new deputy out. He was kind of lazy, he is kind of lazy still. He is retired. I really wanted an information officer, and I put in a request to handle some of these other talks. The deputy wasn't doing diddly. I had forgotten about it, because I was told no, there is no position available. Okay. Suddenly, I don't know the date exactly, I got a call from Washington saying, you know, your request for an information officer, we are going to fill it. I said, "No, kidding! That's great. Who is coming out?" They said, I think she was an 0-1 at the time, maybe an 0-2. They said, "Ruth van Heuven." I said, "Who? Who is she?" They said, "Well, she is a State officer, and she is in the consular section." I said, "Oh, why is she coming out to be my information officer?" They said, "Well, her husband is going to be named DCM at the mission, and we need a place for Ruth to go. She can't work for her husband in any way in the mission, so we thought she could work for you and fill that slot." I said, "Oh." I had actually known Ruth on a personal basis. Our kids had gone to the same nursery school, so I had known Ruth, and she was a very fine officer, very opinionated, but all right. In any case, I knew that the consular officer was leaving. "Why don't you assign her to the consular section?" Because the consular section in Geneva was attached not to Geneva but to the embassy in Bern. The embassy in Bern was responsible for the consular activities in the whole country. I knew that the slot was vacant. They were hemming and hawing, and they said, "Well, we have already paneled a young woman named Kay Dailey," Kate Dailey, Kay Dailey, whatever her first name was, "so she is getting that job." I said, "Well why can't you unpanel her and give the job to Ruth?" They said, "She is a very feisty young Irish girl, and she said she will take us to court if we try that. We are going to leave that one alone. Since there is this opening that you have requested, and USIA has not given us a slot, we are going to fill in with Ruth." Ruth came. She knew a lot of the people on the arms control side because her husband had been dealing with a lot of them in the State Department. She didn't like the trade talks so I let her do some of the arms control. She loved it. She was very efficient, and she got along very well with the ambassador who at that point a guy named Jeff Swaebe. So it worked out very well until, and Ruth and I always got along well, until it came time for the efficiency rating period, the old ER period. Ruth came to me and she said, "I don't want your deputy to write the efficiency rating on me. I want you to write it on me, and I want the ambassador to review it." I could understand why she didn't want my deputy to write it because, I mean they just did not get along, understandably from her perspective. So I said, "Sure, Ruth, I'll be glad to do it." I did it and it was within her prerogative as a State officer to have the ambassador do the review, fine. So I took it up to him, and he also wanted me to write his review. I did that for him and sent them both up to him in draft. He called me up, I remember it was a Friday afternoon. He said, "This is ridiculous." I said, "What do you mean, Mr. Ambassador?" He said, "What you have written for Ruth, for you rating and what you have written for my rating is absolutely wrong. It is ridiculous. No one is that good. You cannot write stuff like this. This is the problem with the State Department. You guys are always patting each other on the back and never saying the bad things. This is crazy. I come from business. I know how things are done." He said, "I want you to take this back, and I want you to think about it over the weekend. I want to talk to you on Monday. I want you to remember I write a review of your performance too. Just remember that." Well I took it back, and I thought about it. On Monday afternoon I went up and talked to the ambassador. He said, "Well did you think it over?" I said, "Yes, I did." He said, "What is your response?" I said, "Mr. Ambassador, do you think Ruth van Heuven is doing a good job?" He said, "She is doing an excellent job." I said, "Mr. Ambassador, do you want Ruth van Heuven to get promoted?" He said, "Yes, I do." I said, "Mr. Ambassador, the rating and your review stands as I have written it. If your answer to those questions are yes, that's the way it has got to go." I left. In the end he took my rating, my writing, he took his review that I had written, and made it even more glowing, because he liked Ruth, and indeed she got promoted. It was a harrowing 48 or 72 hours, because obviously I knew she wasn't as good as you are writing, but if you want to get someone promoted, you have to.

Q: Yes. So, was there any particular incident or occasion that caused great crisis or trouble while you were there that sticks in your mind?

WILSON: No, not in the outside work, nothing that would have shaken the world. There were obviously inside things. When Ambassador Swaebe left and Ambassador Carmen came in, Ambassador Carmen did not get along with van Heuven. Ambassador Carmen did not like the way Martin van Heuven parted his hair. I am serious. He didn't like Martin walking around with a superior attitude. The Ambassador had decreed that none of his staff should do representation unless they checked with him first. This is all right; it is getting into a little everybody's knickers, but you don't usually do that. In any case, Martin van Heuven was a big Yale person. It happened that the Yale Whiffenpoofs were coming out. Martin had arranged to do a reception for them. They were coming through Europe. He failed to check this with the ambassador. There were problems.

Q: Did you find yourself playing the role...

WILSON: Oh sure in the middle of this, absolutely. Particularly since Martin's wife worked for me, I mean it was a very interesting party. I learned to be an internal diplomat very quickly.

Q: I often said in the Foreign Service that real diplomacy is done in the Department or inter-departments within the U.S. government. The outside diplomacy you know where people stand, and you really don't have that much maneuvering room, but...

WILSON: That's right. But I had known Martin from back here, and I had known Ruth, and the ambassador liked me. I was literally in the middle. I think I helped out, although Martin didn't get the representation money for his Whiffenpoofs. At least he wasn't kicked out immediately. But the other thing was when they were, Ambassador Swaebe when he picked Martin van Heuven, the DCM slot was open, he was sent five files from the Department for potential DCM's. We sat up in the bubble and we discussed them. The senior State Department guy was there and was telling the ambassador about this one or that one. The ambassador finally with a big smile on his face, this was in the bubble said, "Now come on Jack, I have read all this. You can't distinguish between them. Everyone is great. You cannot tell me that one is better than the other. The only way you could really make a distinction here is from corridor reputation. I don't want your goddamn fake pile of bullshit. I want to know who is good and who is not good from corridor reputation." He was right; he was absolutely correct. Jack hemmed and hawed and he ended up with Martin.

Q: Well then, you left in '84, and you went to where?

WILSON: I came back to Washington.

Q: I thought you went to Brussels.

WILSON: No, not directly.

Q: You came back to Washington, and what did you do there? This is when you had the Worldnet?

WILSON: Yes. I was brought back from Geneva to do Worldnet, to become the first program director of Worldnet.

Q: Could you explain what Worldnet was or is?

WILSON: It was then an experimental international television service conceived by then USIA director Charles Wick to broadcast views of senior U.S. government officials, put those views up on satellite, interview them, and make these available to opinion makers in some of the critical countries. It particularly involved the arms control talks. Geneva was involved because we were there, and the first Worldnet posts were France, Germany, Netherlands, England, then we and then Italy. These were all critical allies in the IMF talks in particular, and we wanted to bring the allies along. We would have interviews with heads of the arms control agency, with National Security Advisor presenting the U.S. position. So I was in the first round of Worldnet programs when I was overseas. I learned quickly that this was a Charlie Wick special because other posts had done it a couple of weeks before I did because they had trouble hooking up our equipment. I finally had my first one. One of the things that you were required to do was to write an assessment of the thing instantly, not a day or two later, but instantly. So, being naive, I wrote an assessment of the first one we had done. I forgot who the participant was, but we had journalists there and they asked questions. One of the things I said was that it was way too long. It went on for an hour; it would be much better if it were shorter. Now fortunately before I sent this, this was a telegram before E-mail stuff. Before I sent the telegram, I showed it to Ambassador Swaebe who agreed with me totally. Fine. About 6:30 at night I got a phone call from Washington. They asked who I was and I told them. The said, "Oh good, Director Wick wants to speak with you." I said, "He wants to speak with me?" He got on the phone. He had seen the cable because we had a direct to Wick so he would see the cable. He said, "What the hell do you mean by saying it is too long? You are saying that my concept is not a good concept?" I said, "Well Mr. Wick, I thought it was a very good concept, but it dragged on too long, and questions were becoming repetitive. It would be much crisper if it were shorter." He said, "That's bullshit." He used that word. I said, "Why don't you give Ambassador Swaebe," they were good friends, "a call. I cleared this cable with Ambassador Swaebe, and he agrees with it." That calmed him, "He agrees with it?" I said, "Yes, he agrees. Why don't you give him a call." In any case, I guess Wick liked my honesty, because in early December I was on vacation in Rome for Christmas. I got a call. I thought this was another call from Wick. I thought this was my friends putting it over on me because you had to leave your name and number where you are going to be, etc. I got a call back, "Mr. Wick is on his way to the White House to spend Christmas Eve with President Reagan as he does all the time. He will call you. Stay where you are." So I did. He said, "I want you to come back and be the first program director of Worldnet." I said, "Thank you very much. Let me think about it over the Christmas period, and I will contact your office right after New Years and we will talk about it." He said, "Young man, when I offer you a job, it's yours." I said, "Oh, okay, fine." "We will talk about it right after Christmas. That's fine."

Meanwhile, the area director for USIA for Europe, he was a bullshitter, but he had gotten very far in the agency because he was such a bullshitter. I liked him, a guy named Sam Courtney, called and said he wanted me to become the deputy director of VOA Europe. VOA was setting up a new broadcasting arm, setting it up in Munich. I had helped the guy who was going to be heading it up, a guy named Mike Scott. I had helped him with VOA stations around Geneva, in France, Italy. I helped him get these stations pick up VOA. Frank was in on Geneva and he knew he wanted me to become his deputy in Munich. Okay, my wife wasn't certain she wanted to move to Germany, but that's okay. So I called the area director after Mr. Wick made me this offer that I really couldn't refuse. I kind of played a dirty trick on him. I said, "I understand you want me to become the deputy director of VOA Europe in Munich." He said, "Yes." He launched into this oration about how important this job was and how they really needed me, someone of my talents. I said, "I agree Stan. I got this funny phone call the other day from Director Wick. He said he wants me to become the first program director of Worldnet." Without breaking stride this area director proceeded to tell me how important it would be for the area for me to come back to the Worldnet job. He didn't take a breath. He went right on about how the area would benefit from this, how it was so European centric. How I knew all the issues and this would really benefit the area. That's how things work in a bureaucracy.

Then, Wick was visiting Paris, and he called me on a Saturday, and he said, "I want you to be here on Sunday. I want to talk to you." So I got up there somehow, Sunday morning, and we met. It was something at the Embassy. Then we all went out to lunch including Mrs. Wick. I suspect that it was preplanned. She sort of came behind and sort of walked behind with me and said, "Charlie really needs you. You have got to come back. You can't not come back." I told her my personal problems. We left it at that. Then I told you I said, in April he wanted me to come back on a temporary basis, for NATO, which I did.

Q: Well, then you were working on the Worldnet from when to when about?

WILSON: Well, when I came back I was about, I did it in May and June of '84. Then I left to go back to Geneva to check out. I came back in roughly late August, early September of '84 to become the first program director. I left that job in May of '85 to become the executive assistant to the new deputy director of USIA. Part of the reason I left that job was, well, I believed in Worldnet. I was doing a good job. The head of Television was a guy who was slime, and his deputy head was slime. You couldn't trust them. I had a lot of trouble with that. I believe if you are going to work with somebody, you have got to trust them. The head of it never wanted to take responsibility, and he was encouraging director Wick to go to such lengths that it was becoming a non-believable entity. By that I mean they were claiming such an audience for Worldnet that at one point I had to walk with Mr. Wick from the door of where television was to USIA. He couldn't find his way I guess. I said to him, "Mr. Wick, If you keep using these statistics, within three months more people will have seen Worldnet by your statistics than exist in the world. You can't keep using these statistics." Anyway they were, he didn't stop, but it became a very difficult thing up on the hill, it became difficult for the White House, the congress, the OMB to give money for Worldnet. It was running into problems. The audience for Worldnet, you had to sort of take it on faith. I will give you two examples.

One day they were doing some Worldnets to Europe about 5:00 in the morning, 6:00 in the morning, because of the time difference. I wouldn't get into the office until 8:30 or 9:00. One morning a young lady came to me and said, " David we have a problem." I said, "What's the problem?" She said, "We had some space to fill, and we just pulled a film or video off the shelf, we had some time to fill. It was by a guy named Frederick Wiseman. It showed monkeys copulating. It vividly showed monkeys copulating." I said, "Holy Shit!" Well the first thing I had to find out is what it was. I wanted to see it. I didn't want to run off unless I know what I am talking about. Of course all the secretaries are talking; they wanted to see what it was too. It wasn't that bad. Anyway the decision is do we tell Mr. Wick. I said, "No, but I would tell the counselor and let's see what happens." There was no reaction. It was at that point going to six or seven posts in Europe. That was it.

Less than a week later, maybe four days later, this same lady came running in to me again about the same topic. This time with sort of a smile on her face and said, "Well we screwed up again." I said, "What happened this time?" She said, "Well we had a hole to fill and so we pulled something off the shelf from a station in," whatever, KAE something in Los Angeles, "and it showed the contras killing women and children." I said, "Oh my God!" Again I went through the same procedure. You know, I knew what they were going to do with the regular program, but they would just pull something off the shelf. Again, nobody called. Nobody said anything.

So it was still a small enough operation, and I knew the PAO's in the posts that were getting Worldnet. I knew them personally. So, I decided from about 10:00 to noon which is about 4:00 to 6:00 in Europe, I knew they would all be there, and I just thought I would call them and sit down and chat with them. How are things going, what's up. We chatted. Seen Worldnet, do you like it? Yes. I didn't mention about any specifics. I did this with every single PAO. It was obvious that nobody was watching, because even if they did they weren't upset enough to call or write in or something. They would have mentioned it humorously. Nobody was watching. Again they all said they were watching. Based on this, I called the controller of the USIA, a guy named Stan Silverman who I know and like. I said, "Stan," and I explained the situation. I said, "Look, the next world net will be early next week. I would like to make an offer to any PAO who calls you or calls me, whoever you designate, within half an hour of the close of the Worldnet. We will make this at the end of the Worldnet, gets an extra $1,000 in his or her representation budget. I assure you Stan, no one is going to call." He said, "No, I can't take that chance. We haven't got the... I said, "Take it out of the director's budget, but nobody is going to call, because nobody is watching it." He wouldn't let me do it. I didn't do it. But it was the case. FSN's were maybe setting it up, they were looking at it, but no one had the courage to say that hey they weren't watching it. They all dissembled to some extent, at least early on. It was a problem early on.

In the same regard, while I was still in Geneva, the PAO in London was on sick leave at home, he had a heart condition. His information officer was doing Worldnet. At some point they didn't have any questioners. They couldn't get any newspaper guys in. The director, Mr. Wick, went ape. So then counselor called an emergency meeting of all the Worldnet posts in London, and we had the riot act read to us. If you do Worldnet, by God you have got to have questions. I went back to Geneva and the first Worldnet that we had, we couldn't get a correspondent to come. They had seen a couple, and it wasn't very interesting. I finally got one guy who represented AP Dow Jones. Well, we were prohibited from getting American correspondents or people representing American news outlets and agencies. It came right down to the wire, so finally I said to Mike, a guy named Mike Strauss. I said, "If it is any help AP Dow Jones is a foreign consortium for dealing overseas just to avoid U.S. anti trust laws, and we are not an American corporation. We are a European corporation. Great! Good, you could ask questions. But you might know that one of my beloved colleagues in Germany as soon as this went on called Washington and said, "Hey what the hell is this guy Wilson doing in Geneva? They are putting on an American correspondent." So when it was over I got a phone call. I had to explain that while he was American in origin, he was representing a foreign news gathering agency which was incorporated in Europe and not an American news gathering agency. But I was scared to death having seen what happened to the PAO in London, I could have my head handed to me, by not having somebody. So I had to make a quick decision. So we followed up with Worldnet from the Washington perspective, aside from the monkeys copulating and the contras killing women and children.

One of the positive things I learned from Mr. Wick in a negative way while I was director of Worldnet was that in a bureaucracy, if you want to get something done, find out who the individual is who is responsible. Because in a bureaucracy some individual has to be responsible. The USIA had a foreign press center in Los Angeles at the time. Mr. Wick discovered that they weren't pulling down the Worldnet for whatever reason to show to foreign correspondents. You couldn't show it to Americans, but you could show it to foreign correspondents. He wanted to know why. He wanted to know who was responsible for not having that set up in Los Angeles. I was told by the head of television, you find out. You find out who is responsible and why they don't have it. So I rooted around and found out. He wanted to blame the head of the foreign correspondent center in Washington who is responsible for the one in New York and the one in Los Angeles who was an African American who I had worked with and knew and liked and worked with in Africa. Wick didn't particularly like him. It turned out that the reason that we didn't have the program brought down to foreign correspondents in Los Angeles was because the head of the Los Angeles foreign correspondent center was a woman who was a sister of an ABC correspondent who Wick liked and hadn't gotten off her duff to do very much. She didn't think it was worthwhile. So I was faced with what do I tell Wick. No it wasn't this guy in Washington who you don't like, but it was this sister of this woman in Los Angeles who you do like. I told him straight out. That was the only way to deal with it. I found that in the future that was the best way to deal with it, just lay it out. He may not like what you are saying, but in the end he respected me for what I did.

Q: I have heard from people who dealt with Wick working for USIA, one he was a little hard to get used to at first, but I have a great deal of respect for the fact that, you know, he was able to get money, he had ideas. But it was sometimes difficult dealing with him because he had an extremely sort attention span. You had to come in with a chart with maybe one or two lines on it. Did you find this?

WILSON: Yes. His attention span was short. You couldn't ramble on. You had to come in very succinctly with what you wanted to get done. A fairly amusing story along these lines is that when he was making his presentation to the OMB for his budget, the first year he did it or the second year he did it, he made a video and had the people look at it. The second year it was supposed to be on Saturday. It was supposed to be in the morning. The thing dragged on, never on time. It was about five or six o'clock on Saturday afternoon. We made the video. They said, "Well Mr. Wick," It was David, this is the guy who got fired. A former Congressman. Anyway, it will come to me, a good guy, smart guy. He said. "Look we can take you now if you want or we can do it on Monday morning." Wick said, "Well let's do it now." He said to his staff, "Just a minute." He said, "We will give you 15 minutes, Mr. Wick." So they did. We all came into the room to do this presentation, he handed out popcorn. He said, "I know you are going to do a video, so I figured if we are going to go to the movies we might as well have popcorn." It worked. It was done very well, and Wick got his money. That part did work very well.

But the idea of personal responsibility in a bureaucracy I think is very important. I do believe in it, whether it is State Department, Defense Department, Agriculture, whatever. My own philosophy now in working with the foreign affairs community, if someone says oh, I can't do it because of the regulations, I say well the regulations are written by human beings. Who made this particular regulation, and what is the purpose behind it? Often people will hide behind the manual of operation and procedures and say we just can't do it because, without a little thinking further. If you really want to accomplish something in a bureaucracy, you have got to look behind the regulations. I think that becomes very critical.

I don't know if I mentioned it, but one of the problems we ran into when we actually got to Brussels was a bureaucratic regulation from the State Department which provided that for educational travel, you could go back up until age 22 or 23, whatever it said for college purposes or high school, was allowable once a year. Fine. My older son came over to visit us. He wanted to go back because his college was starting. They had a three week winter program for whatever reasons. He had to do a winter study program. He had to be back at a certain time. I went to get his ticket from the admin section, and was told he can't leave until four or five days after he needed to be back. I said "Why?" They said it is because of regulations. It has got to be 365 days and it's not. It has got to be a full year. I was furious, but I couldn't do anything about it. My son went to the people in Williams College. He was going to take a course like baseball statistics. That was fine. He went to the head of the course and said, "You know, I am not going to be here for the first two or three days of the class. If that's okay." "No," the teacher said, "No. I front loaded the course and if you aren't going to be here, you can't take the course." Which meant that he was getting off campus to go skiing or something for the next three weeks. That is what it meant. My son was majoring in chemistry, and he got the chemistry department to devise a winter studies program for him, and he did that. I then talked to the State Department. I wasn't dealing with USIA, I was dealing with State. They said, "Oh yes, these are the regulations. This is the way Congress wants it." Well it happens we get a lot of, in Brussels we had a lot of CODELs (Congressional delegations) come through. I made a point of asking both staffers and members of Congress in the 70's why was this regulation in place. Of course, nobody had ever heard of it. Nobody cared; nobody knew, and they all said that is ridiculous. So armed with this I went back to the Director General's office in State and said, "Hey you can't tell me you have got this regulation in place because Congress wants it. Congress doesn't want it. They don't care. They think it is ridiculous. You can't run an academic program on the State Department guidelines. You have got to have some flexibility because sometimes people have got to go back earlier or later. The academic schedule does not run on either the regular calendar or the State Department regulations." I had a major battle with the State Department. When I came back for some leave, I made a point of going over there. The Deputy Director General said, "Look, you are absolutely right. See if you can get USIA and others to go along with this because the regulation is wrong. It should be changed." They said, we agree with you and here is what the new regulation is going to be. I said, "Well good. Let's put it into effect." They said, "No, we have to clear it," I think it was 26 agencies. I said, "Oh my God." Ultimately, after a year and a half I got it changed. It said about a year, but if a student needs to go back for academic reasons or needs to go on a choir or sports activity, it could be less than a year. I got that part of it changed. But then it was not just State Department but Williams College refused to give my son a diploma. They said, "You know, he didn't take this winter studies program." I said, "But he did." He called me and was all upset. He said, "What should I do?" I said, "What's the matter?" He told me. What he had done, he hadn't gone to the registrar and told them he was taking this chemistry program. It was his fault. He didn't do it, but they were going to deny him graduation. I said, "That is absolutely insane." I was prepared to fly home if that were the case. Well, he finally got them to agree, the committee on academic exceptions met and agreed that if he would pay a $50 fine, that they would recognize the course he took. He did the work; he did a good job, and the whole thing would be dropped, and he could get his diploma. He said, "What should I do?" I said, "Pay it. I will send you the extra $50. Pay it." Which he did, but then, when it came to graduation week. This was the little college up in New England.

Q: I spent four years at the little college up in New England, class of '50.

WILSON: Where?

Q: Williams.

WILSON: You're kidding!

Q: So I know where it is.

WILSON: Well, I'll be damned. In any case the President had a little garden party for the parents and the graduates in the presidential garden. I have forgotten what his name is now. I braced him in his own garden. I said, "This is crazy. This $50." Of course he didn't know anything about it. He didn't know what I was talking about. He said, contact so and so, which I did. All I wanted was the return of the $50. Well, dammit, they were adamant. No, they were not going to return the $50. By that time I was getting - I still get - as you obviously know, they are extremely good in their relations. I get so much mail from them now, even though it was a long time. They do a tremendous number of events. I get invited to go on study tours. It was very good. In any case, they said, no way are we going to refund the $50. Well, Whitney's advisor in chemistry was a good friend of his. He had something to do with alumni relations. He wrote back a letter saying what a wonderful student Whitney was and all this and how fortunate Williams was to have him, etc. That still didn't satisfy me. So in making a small contribution to the parent's scholarship fund, I rote a note saying, I would like to send another $50 but I am a little bit ticked off. I explained, just one page. Williams College has $50. I would like it very much if you would get that $50 and put it in the parents scholarship fund. Within a week, done. They actually got the money and put it in the parents scholarship fund. I contribute every year now; I was very pleased. but even a pace like Williams has its own little bureaucracy.

Q: Oh, God, yes.

WILSON: I mean it is a great place. I could never see why my son wanted to go there because I grew up in Pittsfield which is 20 miles away. I wanted to get away from it. But in retrospect it was a great place for him to go and he truly loved it. He started out wanting to play hockey because he played hockey in Canada, but it soon became apparent that he was not good enough to get on the hockey team. So he got on the Rugby team which was a non officially recognized sport because apparently several years earlier the rugby people had become rowdy. They had torn up some things. It was a club sport rather than a college sport. He enjoyed rugby very much. It was on the weekends. It was a great event for him, and he still maintains contact with many of his Williams colleagues. Anyway, what I am saying, you have to learn to deal with the bureaucracy in the State Department or Williams College, and you can do it. You don't have to just give up. An individual can and often does make a difference, and that's the philosophy. If you want to succeed in the Foreign Service to the extent that I succeeded, that has been my philosophy, to be honest, to be direct, not aggressive but honestly direct, and persist in trying to get something done.

Q: Well in '85 you left...

WILSON: I went over to be executive assistant to the deputy director. I left Worldnet.

Q: To close off at this point when you left Worldnet how did you feel? I mean you didn't think people were watching it.

WILSON: They weren't.

Q: A good idea that didn't work.

WILSON: It was an excellent idea. It was working, it just took a longer time to work. It wasn't going to be instantly. Part of the success is that Wick had good contacts in the administration and he could get people to appear on the program. It was working. I mean the idea is a good idea. It just was pushed to an extreme. Regular programs overseas you just could not get people to come regularly to watch. On an occasional basis if you got Secretary Schultz, if you got somebody to talk about a particular subject that was relevant at the moment in a given country, absolutely. It worked extremely well.

Q: You were able to direct programs, let's say somebody talking about the Persian Gulf, so you could have people talking in Qatar or Kuwait.

WILSON: Yes. Not while I was there, but ultimately when they expanded these areas, you could do that.

Q: That would make, I mean that would pick off...

WILSON: Sure, and they do that now. It would take another decade before you had the capability in all these places to do that. The capability exists now. You can direct a program into a given area, so the concept is good. You just couldn't push it as fast as Wick wanted to push it, and you couldn't push it as often as Wick wanted to push it. That was the problem, but it was good.

Q: I think this is one of the problems of our process, a gestation period for a lot of programs or doing things takes longer than the person who might come up with the idea hopes, particularly if they are a political appointee. They feel the clock ticking and they want to show something done on their watch rather than to allow it to percolate for awhile.

WILSON: That is absolutely right, and ultimately it became a fairly successful program and useful. Success meaning a post overseas can use this to achieve its objectives at a given moment. Yes you can. But at the beginning, as one colleague said, who later became a counselor in the agency, when he was PAO in NATO, and I used to see his reports coming in saying how many people watched it. I said, "Gee Stan how did you get so many people in to watch it." He said, "Well there was me, there was a couple of people from the political section, and then the two guys that brought the pizza. They were there too." You had to be creative in how you used it. It is a useful tool, but not the way it was being pushed. But I didn't mind Wick pushing it, so much as I didn't like working for the head of television who was a liar. That was the problem, but it was a problem of blaming someone else, never wanting to take the blame himself. I couldn't stand that.

Q: We might stop at this point and pick it up the next time when you moved over to..

WILSON: Executive assistant to the deputy director.

Q: That was in '85. We will pick it up at that point.

WILSON: And that was '85 through the summer through July of '88.

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Q: Today is March 1, 2001. David, let's talk about what you did in 1985.

WILSON: I moved from the television service where I was program director of Worldnet to become the executive assistant to the newly minted deputy director of USIA, Marvin Stone. Marvin Stone had been previously the editor in chief of U.S. News and World Report. He was a moderate Republican with a considerable number of "democratic" views. He was acceptable to the director, Charlie Wick. As I said before, Mr. Wick really wasn't political. Marvin Stone knew Washington. He knew a lot of people, and he knew how to get around and get things done.

Q: So you did this from '85 until when?

WILSON: Until July of '88.

Q: Now, how did Mr. Stone fit into the establishment and how did he operate?

WILSON: He was an outsider, but he was very well organized. He kept maybe eight or ten files on his desk that he was working on, that he would open up and deal with it. He used to get a kick out of some of the Foreign Service jargon, the lingo. He would tease us about it. The word "Tranche" for example, Foreign Service Officers tend to use that a lot. He would make fun of it. He also was very strict on some of the words that would come up to him on a memo. He said when he was editor of the magazine, there were certain words that he would not allow in, such as "upcoming." You could not put that in. If it came up and I saw it, and I put it through, I caught hell. But he had his peculiarities along those lines. He was a very compassionate person. He trusted people until he found that they couldn't be trusted, and then he would deal accordingly with them. He had very specific time frames. He liked to go home at 5:30 or 6:00. He wasn't one of these people who was given to staying all night to get the job done. If he gave you a task, he assumed it would be done and done properly. He didn't look over your shoulder. As the executive assistant, I tended to get some of the, much of the, dirty work that he didn't want to deal with, personnel problems, discipline problems, writing OER problems, this kind of thing. I did OER's on all of the area directors and the heads of the various media and cultural elements. That all came to me to do. We had a problem with a person who was the deputy in the bureau of educational and cultural affairs. Now it is being called ECA in the new State Department. This guy was a decent fellow, but he tended to have a very deep voice, a very loud voice, and he shouted. Sure as hell, I could tell he particularly shouted at women. Maybe two or three times a month one of his staff, usually female, would come into my office and cry. I could almost time it just like the Secret Service was timing how long it took the President to get there after Monica Lewinski ended up in the West Wing, how long it would take for this guy to come into my office, close the door, pound on the desk, "It was not so." I would let him pound, let him talk. He would calm down, life went on. I learned to be a good listener to both sides. We did some interesting things. One of the more interesting things was trying to get rid of the responsibility for international fairs.

Q: International fairs being what?

WILSON: Fairs, you know, like you have the world Expo '68.

Q: Oh I thought it was affairs.

WILSON: Affairs you wouldn't want to get rid of. Stimulating, some. But I am talking about world fairs and world expos and things of this type. For some reason it had fallen to USIA to be the operating agency in this. These brought together State Department and Commerce in particular. Commerce should really have been handling it, but by some act of Congress it was designated as a USIA function. USIA never really had the money to do this. We tried and tried to get out from underneath it. Some people in USIA liked doing this, so if they said we were going to stop, they didn't mean it. They continued to do it until problems arose. Usually, these events were headed by political appointees, regardless of party. It depended on who was in power. They found that even though it was promised that USIA would get out of it and Commerce would get into it, State just took a non-committal seat. State should have taken the lead because State should have, and the director of foreign affairs projects, who was in State, just sat back and did nothing. You had problems with the heads of these organizations in these events bringing in their political friends, bringing in their relatives. There were a few scandals that went on with it. I don't know who does it now. State has to because it is part of State whether they like it or not. I would hope that State would have the courage to say hey, this is a Department of Commerce affair, not a State Department affair. That is one of the things I dealt with over a period of three years in USIA, trying to get it out of USIA. I was grossly unsuccessful in attempting to do that.

Another very interesting area was the area of broadcasting, the Voice of America, and particularly Cuban broadcasting. As you know, under the Voice of America, nominally under the Voice of America there was established in the early 80's a broadcast outfit known as Radio Marti. Marti being a Cuban patriot, etc. This is designed to broadcast into Cuba to let the Cuban people know about what freedom was and how Castro was keeping things from them, etc. Castro tried to block it. He wasn't very successful. What he did succeed in blocking was some of the more powerful midwest and southern radio channels, the radio station channels in their assigned areas. This of course, led the government to reimburse these stations handsomely. Even when Castro stopped jamming, the government kept reimbursing. That's okay.

In any case, at that point the founder and head of the Cuban American Foundation was a man named Jorge Mas Canosa. He was very powerful, particularly among people in Florida and New Jersey. Both parties courted him. He tended to lean more towards the Republican guy than not. He was a pain. He would call the director of USIA, Charlie Wick and say he wanted us to do this, that, and the other thing. Mr. Wick would turn it over to my boss, Marvin Stone, and Marvin would in turn, turn it over to me to deal with, with Jorge.

Part of the broadcasting to Cuba act provided that after the first 18 months, 24 months, whatever it was, a study had to be done and a survey to see how effective it was or how effective it wasn't. This study had to be submitted to Congress. Fair enough. It happens all the time. How can I put it. Mr. Stone was put in charge of the government survey, and gave it to me. I in turn gave it to the head of the research and evaluation staff, who was a political appointee. That was fine. He kept me informed as to what he was doing. He hired a researcher in the area. People did the research. The report came back in draft. It was a very balanced and honest report. It praised many of the things that Radio Marti was doing. It talked about the difficulty of getting through. It talked about a few of the negatives. Balanced, a good report. I liked it; Mr. Stone liked it. The draft went to Jorge Mas. He was up in the air. He said, "You can't send this to Congress." He ranted and raved enough I had to hold the telephone away from my ear. Very unhappy. Of course, if he was unhappy, Mr. Stone passed this along to Mr. Wick who didn't want him to be too unhappy because that could go to some of the higher ups in the administration. What to do? Well, I counseled my boss that you can't bury this report because the opponents of Radio Marti obviously know about its existence, know about it being done. If you bury it and don't send it forward, it is going to cause all kinds of hell in Washington. At least for a couple of days in any case, it would be a good media story. You know, administration buries negative report on Radio Marti. I then came up with an idea, and it was accepted. My idea was let's do a second report, and we will talk to the people that are going to do the report. Meanwhile, don't bury this first report, send it to the Hill as we are required by law, but send it a day or two before the Easter recess. What I said was bought. The report was sent. Nothing more was ever heard. We sent it exactly to the people we were supposed to send it to. Nobody said anything. Nobody said, "Boo." We didn't kill it; we didn't bury it.

We then set out to commission someone else to do a report, someone who is, I shouldn't say this on tape, but why the hell not? Someone who is more favorably disposed to Jorge Mas Canosa, and someone of whom he approved in advance. Very important. We had several different people, and we came up with one. Very impressive credentials. He was from New York. He had a Ph.D. from this university and MA from that university, etc. I worked this out with the head of research. I was about to sign the contract for him when I got an anonymous phone call. I usually don't pay attention to anonymous phone calls. I figure if it is worthwhile saying, then someone is going to identify themselves. This was an anonymous phone call from someone at the Voice of America, because the particular person had done some work for the Voice of America. The essence of the call was take a look at this gentleman's rï¿½sumï¿½ and check out the facts that he put down. Check out the universities he claims he has degrees from BA's to doctorates. Check this out; check that out. So I did. I don't know why I did, but I did.

Q: Well you almost have to in that sort of situation.

WILSON: It turned out that three of the universities he listed from which he said he got degrees had never heard of him. The fourth university didn't exist. There were other problems with his veracity. So I sat down with the head of research, and I sat down with Mr. Stone, and we had to decide what to do. The decision was that I should deal with it, and if necessary I would tell him that we were no longer going to award him the contract and tell him why. I called him. He was in New York. I said, "You know we have been doing a little bit of checking." He said, "I understand. I withdraw my name." I didn't have to say anything further. He made what could have been a very delicate situation much more palatable. But it was very interesting, because what he was doing is not an unusual occurrence. Apparently people are forging degrees and claiming degrees in things they haven't done on rï¿½sumï¿½s. It is fairly common.

Q: It keeps turning up on people, you know, on people who apply in places you would suspect, assume that some checking had been done.

WILSON: Yes. Isn't that the case. In any case, we got someone else to do the new study. It turned out glowing. Radio Marti was God's given instrument. Mr. Jorge Mas was happy. Everyone else was happy. That was it. So we had two reports.

Q: I have a long set of interviews with Kenneth Skoug. I don't know if you ever ran across him, but he was very much involved talking about the politics of Radio Marti and all that.

WILSON: Yes. And before I left they were talking about Television Marti. Well, first of all, Radio Marti gets through. It gets through particularly in the rather urban areas, it gets through on the beaches, etc. TV Marti doesn't get through at all. I don't know if the budget for TV Marti was part of the USIA budget. I don't know if it is still part of USIA budget not. But it is a false budget because I think it was somewhere between 20 and 30 million, I don't know it, went up and down. That didn't include the cost of the balloon to keep the transmitter going around. That cost was buried in the Defense Department budget somewhere around 40 million dollars. But whatever connected the two, it was up there. But regardless of the cost, it is just not getting through. There is no question about it. Now with Jorge Mas Canosa no longer with us, with the Cuban American Foundation being less powerful than it was, you don't know what is going to happen, but it was obvious that people in the Cuban American population were looking for the time when Castro would be overthrown, die, and they could then go back into Cuba and run the country. That has been their...

Q: Yes, the refugee groups, they all think it will happen, and time has gone by and whatever they had is not going to come back. There is usually a good solid time lapse. I mean these people are thinking in 1950 terms.

WILSON: Well this is the problem that the Voice of America faces in particular with its refugees from eastern Europe who are doing broadcasting into the then Soviet Union, now the former Soviet Union and countries of eastern Europe, or other countries for that matter, Iran, it doesn't matter where. They have perhaps different points of view from the U.S. government. The broadcasts have to be monitored very carefully. Not apropos that, but I have a friend who had been the head of the, I had gone to college with him. He was originally Laotian. He came into the USIA as a Laotian radio broadcaster. He became the head of the Laotian service. During the '60 election campaign, the policy was you could not talk about a cease fire. You could talk about a step down. So one day I said to him, "Taman, how do you do this?" He said, "There is no such thing as step-down in Lao. We call it a cease fire." I said, "Well that goes against policy." He said, "But who with a policy background has enough Lao to know what I am saying?" He got us. And this goes on for all the languages, all the language services. You have to keep fairly close tabs on them every once in awhile.

Many of my problems with the Voice of America while I was working for the deputy director lay in the personnel area. We had another guy who was doing one of the Soviet language services. His name was Nodar Gingi Hasvili. He was from Georgia, Soviet Georgia. He was having a lot of problems with some of his patriots in the service and with some of the Americans. He accused them all of anti-Semitism. This was a major issue. So, we did not want this to get out of hand, and so Mr. Stone and I convened a hearing. We had the American there who he was accusing and some of his other colleagues there. He was there. This lasted almost a week, a long time. We took this extremely seriously. We did not in the end find any evidence of anti-Semitism. It may have been under the surface; it may have been individuals; but we did not find that Mr. Gingi Hasvili was having troubles because he was Jewish. It did not seem to be the case. There were some pretty high powered officials, and some of those people we were dealing with are now even more high powered in the success of radio stations. What can I say? Meanwhile, Mr. Gingi Hasvili is in London working for the BBC. One of the things that I tried to do was to get him a job here in Washington, to get him out of Voice. I went to a lot of different places including the CIA to see if we could get him a job doing translations or, basically, translations of Soviet language. He spoke several of the languages in the Soviet Union. He was a professor. We could not really get him, we got him one job for a short period. But it was very interesting in dealing with him, because I must have dealt with him, his name was Nodar, I must have dealt with Nodar at least once a week. He'd come in and talk. I'd listen. He felt better about it. We got him a job in our research office in USIA. We got him some kind of a job in INR in stages for a temporary job. But basically it was a very interesting phenomenon because he was brought up on communism. He said, "You know, I left a good position," in whatever university he was in. He said, "I had a car. I had a nice apartment. I had a dacha in the country. They provided for me. Over here I have nothing." He was almost longing for the good old days of communism providing. It was quite remarkable. He was an intelligent person. I mean extremely intelligent. I know he was still following up because later when I was in Brussels, I got a call from a lawyer. He wanted me to do a deposition on the situation with Nodar, etc. I haven't heard further from them, but I am still sure that he is trying to redeem himself in some way in the United States. I don't know. But those were the kinds of issues we dealt with. The anti-Semitism was a particularly sensitive issue because his wasn't the only case. There were a couple of others. It was always dealing with eastern Europe. It never could be proved directly, but one suspects individual cases, there was beneath the surface a problem.

Q: Well, these were people who didn't leave their prejudices behind. I'm sure there are other prejudices going too.

WILSON: That's exactly right.

Q: Did you have any problem in USIA in your time there because you were finding yourself sort of stuck with a lot of personnel things, sort of the policy level agenda or race? Did you, I mean, was this any particular issue or how...

WILSON: No. Race never played a role in my view. I never recall a case. Gender, no. I think I told you when I was on the Board of Examiners for a period, the head of our equal employment opportunities kept wondering if a certain African American had passed the exam. I kept telling him they haven't taken the exam yet. How can they pass it? "Well you know what I mean. Are they going to pass?" "I guess they will but I don't know. We have got to interview them first." While I was in the deputy director's office I was not confronted with any racial problems, any that made an impression on me that I can remember. This was during the period when President Reagan met with Soviet Prime Minister Brezhnev in Geneva. No it was Gorbachev, sorry. We had the situation where Mr. Wick went over and a USIA officer, the PAO in Geneva was assigned the task of just taking care of Mr. Wick. Other people were assigned other things to take care of President Reagan, but the PAO was assigned to take care of Mr. Wick. That's the way things go. But when they got back, there was a decision to be made as to who and how, who was going to implement, State or USIA or both, how are they going to implement the decision that Mr. Reagan made at the summit in Geneva. There was a major conflict between State and USIA as to what should be done. It was major, major. Mr. Wick said that he knew what was to be done, and the deputy assistant secretary for the area, a man named Mark Palmer who later became ambassador to Hungary, said he knew what was going to be done because he was over there too. Nothing happened for awhile. A big discussion as to who was going to do what. Well, one day my boss, Mr. Stone, said, "Come on in. Charlie," Charlie Wick, "Charlie wants us in his office." We all went in, and the counselor for the agency was there, and Mr. Wick's secretary was there. Mr. Wick said, "Get Mark Palmer on the phone." He got Mr. Palmer, Secretary Palmer on the phone, put him on the speaker phone. There were the usual pleasantries, but they weren't so pleasant. They went through it again, the litany. Mark Palmer said, "Mr. Wick, I know exactly what the president wanted. We are going to implement it over here." Mr. Wick said, "No, I am sorry, Mark. I know exactly what the president wants because he had talked to me, and we are going to do," this, that and the other thing. Impasse. Wick then turned to his secretary, Pat Stevens and said, "Pat, get the President on the phone. We'll settle this." We all looked up. There was silence on the other end. I assume that Mr. Wick had talked to her in advance. She said, "You mean on his private line, Mr. Wick?" He said, "Yes on his private line." So she rustled the pages a little bit and began to punch in some numbers. All of a sudden on the other end Mark Palmer said, "Okay, Mr. Wick, you win, We will do it the way you want it. You will, we will do it." Wick said, "Okay, Pat, just cancel the call to the President." Big smile on Wick's face. But it was a good lesson. We don't know if he could have gotten through. He did spend time with the president, personal time. We knew he had the number to get through, but I don't know if he could have gotten through or not.

Q: Or if the president would have remembered with all the calls he had.

WILSON: Yes. But it was the perception of power that is very important. That was a very big factor in USIA under Charlie Wick. Many people did not like him for various reasons. They thought he was a lightweight and a showman and all this. But while he was there, and while President Reagan was in office, USIA had entree into the highest circles of the foreign affairs community whether it be the National Security Council, or the highest level State Department meetings in the morning, because Wick was perceived as having access to the president. No one was going to challenge that, and no none was going to call him on the carpet for that. So his staff, his underlings, his people were accepted and received very warmly and very positively. Perception in Washington is extremely important.

Q: Oh, absolutely. How did you find the relationship between Wick and Stone?

WILSON: Much better than between Wick and any of his previous deputy directors. Much better. Because Stone wasn't after the job. Everyone else who was there who had taken it was looking at it as a stepping stone, pardon the expression, to other things, political power, etc. Stone was not. He was reluctant to take the job because he had just sold U.S. News and World Report. He was financially well off. He didn't want the hassle. And originally when he was approached he turned it down. Then a mutual friend who was mutually familiar with both Wick and Stone, a man named Leonard Marks who had been head of the U.S. Information Agency and had been Lyndon Johnson's communications lawyer, etc., starting out with Lady Bird Johnson and her television and radio stations. In any case, Marks got Stone. Stone at first turned it down flat. Then about a month later, Marks took Stone out to lunch and said, "you have got to do it for the good of the country. Wick needs you. He is not organized. You know Washington. He needs you." He said he would do it, and he did. He had a very good relationship. On the contrary, Gene Kopp who was there was all right, but the first deputy director whose name now escapes me, Wick and he did not get along. He was thrust upon Wick by the Republican administration. He decided to build a private dining room for himself. That didn't go over too well. But the problem was this guy, whose name I don't remember at the moment was a business partner of William Safire, the columnist. So this immediately put Mr. Safire and Mr. Wick at each other's throats. Mr. Safire was continually criticizing Wick in his columns because of this former partner who Wick finally got rid of as deputy director. Wick just couldn't stand him. He said, "I want him out of here." That did happen. Then a rather amusing incident, well after this guy left, but while Mr. Safire was still critical of Mr. Wick in his columns. It happened that both gentlemen were having dinner at the Palm Restaurant on 19th. Street in Washington. Wick finished first and was walking out and he saw Bill Safire. Wick is not an ideologue. He is a nice guy unless you are working for him. He decided, he said, "Hi, Bill." He decided to walk over and say look, let's let bygones be bygones. He stuck out his hand to shake Safire's hand and knocked a full glass of red wine into Safire's lap. It was an accident, I guess. But that's the way things go sometimes in Washington.

The politics of running an agency in Washington at the senior level is just fascinating because a lot you deal with issues, but you deal with people who deal with issues. On the cultural side a couple of people were thrust into the agency who were just not good. When you see this happening, you somehow manage to pull together, you don't send them away, but you make them less relevant to the workings of the operation even though they have the title. That was one of the things we did very well. You have to vet, you have to vet people coming in for jobs.

Well before Wick, and this is a story, and I don't know if it is fact but it is a story that was told to me by a former deputy director. During the Frank Shakespeare, the Watergate era, someone was sent over from the While House to be the general counsel of USIA, a man named Gordon Strachan. He was interviewed by the then deputy director, who was a good Republican. It was in the middle of the Watergate era. This was told to me by the then deputy director. The subject of Watergate came up. The deputy director asked him, "Were you, Gordon, in any way involved? Is there any way you could bring discredit on the United States Information Agency if you become general counsel?" This young baby faced kid looked at him and said, "Sir, I was not involved in any way. I didn't do anything that could bring discredit upon the agency." About a week later the deputy director learned that that very morning, Mr. Strachan was up on the Hill spilling his guts talking about carrying money and various other assorted things dealing with Watergate. This leaked out and of course, he never got the job of general counsel. But veracity is not always front and center in some of the political dealings. You have to be very careful. And you see that when you are dealing at the top it is very critical.

On assignments. When I was working with the deputy director, it came time for me to be reassigned, he said, "Where do you want to go? Let me know." He named three places that are out; can't go there. I chose the U.S. mission to the European Community in Brussels. I did the paperwork and I applied. Several weeks later somebody from personnel came to me and said, "Are you sure you want to go to Brussels?" I said, "Yes, I do. I have had the background in economic affairs. I think I can do a good job. I like NATO and am close to that." "Well you know, there is somebody else that would like this job as well. Would you like to do anything else?" I said, "No, I want Brussels." Several days later my boss called me in and said, "Do you really want Brussels? Could I tempt you with something else?" I said, "No." He said, "All right." But there were obviously people calling trying to get the job, and even now when you apply for jobs at State or something, it is the personal connection that somehow plays a role.

Q: Oh, absolutely.

WILSON: You have to be qualified, but it is the personal connection that plays a major role in assignments.

Q: And of course, when you get to something like Paris, Brussels and all, all of a sudden all the sharks start swimming around. Well then you went to Brussels in?

WILSON: 1988. It was July or August when I arrived there in 1988.

Q: You were there until when?

WILSON: I was there until August of '92.

Q: What was your job?

WILSON: I was the public affairs counselor to the U.S. mission to the European Community which is now called the European Union.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

WILSON: Well, we had several. I am trying to think of who the, we had a political appointee who was a little guy. His name was Alfred Kingon. When I met him he was back in Washington at first before I went over, he had back problems. One of the ways he got this particular back problem was his unfamiliarity with the European bathroom system. I don't know if you know, but in many of the European bathtubs they have a hand held shower, which you could take out of the wall. He did not realize this and being as small as he was, he figured that he could scrunch down underneath it. And he did, and pulled his back out.

Kingon was a nice guy, but he had very fixed ideas in addition to not being familiar with European bathrooms. He wanted to do some things with other European countries. Of course we were really accredited only to Brussels. He didn't understand that really, and whatever he wanted to do, it was my job. He wanted to do this on the public affairs side, and I attempted to deflect him. What I suggested was look, let's put out a newsletter to American business people operating in various communities around, various centers around the European Union, the European Community and in the United States. It will deal with European affairs, businesses. He thought that this was a great idea. So, there was born and I developed the product that now still exists called the Letter from Brussels, based on some of the New Yorker "letters from." It was designed for American business people operating in Europe and for their counterpart offices back in the States. I had to get special permission from USIA to do this because USIA is not supposed to send any information to people in the States, at least they weren't. We went through the general counsel's office, and I had to assure them that any mailings to people in the States would be not done by USIA but be done by the State Department which had no such restrictions. It was a very fine line, and it was more of a semantic difference than a real difference, but that was accepted by USIA. I had to figure out how to get a mailing list. I had never done this before. I went to some private organizations in the United States. We got mailing lists, mailing lists throughout Europe. We put out about 800 in our first issue. It was six pages. It had a letter, an editorial from the ambassador. It was mightily successful. I mean, we knew that because several businessmen in Brussels and around Europe who either didn't get their copy or threw it out, came complaining to us saying what the hell are you doing going over our heads to our people back in the States. They are calling us asking us about certain things that you put in there. We don't know anything about them. So it was effective. We put while I was there, we put out about six issues. Well, we probably put out about nine issues. Then it expanded. Everybody liked it and wanted to get stuff in. I left, and it is still going. It is still going now as a matter of fact. It is not in the form that it used to be. It is designed to be a handy quick read form that the CEO could take into the john with him, just glance at it. If you had something that he was interested in, he could underline or tell one of his staff to follow up on this. Well by the time I left, or after I left, years after I left, we got an ambassador named Stu Eizenstadt. He was a good guy. And the first letter form Brussels that came out that I saw under Stu Eizenstadt, had his editorial leading off, which was fine. But his editorial itself was six pages. The whole thing was about 14 or 16. It defeated the whole purpose of the publication. I don't know if it is still going. But I felt good about it because I kept Ambassador Kingon happy. It made a difference to some businessmen. It was useful to people.

Q: What was our mission to the European Community doing? I mean what did you see as its tasks and your role in that?

WILSON: It was very clear. We had many trade issues with the Europeans. Some of the issues lent themselves very specifically to public affairs treatment. For example the so-called bST issue which is hormones fed to cattle, a hormone called bovine s somatotropin you feed cattle to make them fatter, make them produce more meat. The Europeans were fighting this. They didn't want to have this kind of tainted meat imported into European countries. Our job was to try to get out the word that this is not dangerous. That scientifically at least this is not going to cause any problems. We did this through newspaper articles. We did this through bringing over experts that would talk on radio programs or television programs. We used our international visitors program to send people from the European Community who made some of the decisions, to the States to go to Monsanto and other places to see exactly what was done. This was a made for public affairs kind of issue, and it is still going on.

Q: On genetically modified wheat and everything else. Big article in the paper today in the Washington Post.

WILSON: Yes, exactly. It is still going on. An offshoot of this which hasn't got as much publicity is porcine somatotropin, the same type of stuff you give to cows except this is going to pigs, pork. Several European countries were using this, such as the Netherlands. India was using it, and Israel was using it.

Q: Israel?

WILSON: Israel, yes.

Q: Well one of the big pork producers.

WILSON: Israel is. They export it. A big pork exporter believe it or not. The reason the Netherlands is using it is the pST provides much more meat and much less waste, so that in a small country like the Netherlands pig droppings are a big problem. If you can have less droppings and more meat, you are well ahead of the game. But this still hasn't been totally accepted by the European Community.

Q: You were saying there was another issue.

WILSON: Lots of issues. Certainly there was the issue of American films, particularly in France.

Q: Well France is the major producer of films in Europe. It is a big industry.

WILSON: Italy produces a lot. I will get back to films, the thing I was going to talk about is tobacco. This gave me a personal problem. Not the cigarette side so much, though I always marveled at the American legislation which did not require cigarette manufacturers to put a warning on cigarettes for export. That really bothered me. In any case, a company called the American Tobacco Company produces chewing tobacco. Something you chew. Baseball players, well they don't use it anymore. It is cancer causing. There was a big issue, the European, the British parliament passed a law. The heads of American Tobacco Company got a hold of State Department people, I won't quote their names, and they said you have really got to get to the Europeans and get them to change their position on this. We can't have the European Parliament, the European Commission adopting a ban on distribution of chewing tobacco in Europe. Obviously this was pointing toward doing some public affairs operation. I personally talked to the ambassador and said, "Look, I cannot do this. I will not do this. This is something I can't do." He was not happy about it either. From my Geneva experience, I had gotten to know Dr. Koop, the surgeon general. When I was back in this country I talked to him about it. He said, "Well, you know, if we take this up as an issue, as a government issue. Let me know." I was prepared to. I would never do this under most circumstances, but I was really ticked off. Finally the ambassador was able to convince Secretary Eagleburger to let it drop, and we did not have to push it. I would have been very hard pressed to push the Europeans to letting in chewing tobacco if they wanted to keep it out. I could not have done that. I would not have done it. I mean it was a moral issue as far as, it was not a health issue to me, it was a moral issue. And I did not have to, because the ambassador backed me up on it. We did not have to pursue it. That was a major problem.

On films, Jack Valenti and company established an office in Brussels that had three or so people dealing with it. There is a very interesting series of events that I think, was interesting for the Foreign Service. One incident will suffice. Back in the late 80's, early 90's was a time when you were just getting E-mail. Some were classified; some were not. Sometimes you had faxes but it was often E-mail. Two incidents. The U.S. Mission to the European Community had representatives from the Department of Commerce, Department of State, U.S. Trade Representative's office, Department of Agriculture. They were all there. The one that wasn't there, and the one the ambassador strongly resisted and rightly so was CIA. They were in the embassy down the street, but they were not allowed to penetrate our operation. The ambassador was very firm. But in any case, the head of the Commerce operation was a nice guy. He wasn't terribly swift, but he was a nice guy. He was using some of the new technology, the E-mail technology, and he typed up something that was highly critical of some of his superiors back in Washington as kind of a joke. It was really critical. He didn't delete it, and he sent it in error. All kinds of problems.

Q: Oh, God.

WILSON: In any case that was the humorous side. In another case, now this shows you some of the problems. Because of the six hour time difference, Washington usually wakes up about four or five o'clock in the afternoon, which was before they sent out cables and things which is about ten or eleven o'clock in Europe anywhere you are. Our USTR guy particularly had this problem and would often get calls at home you have got to do this, that, or the other thing. At one point he got a call at home saying we want you to take into the European Community the following message concerning XYZ, whatever it was. He was told, when you get in you will find it on your E-mail in the office. Print it up properly and deliver it to the European Commission. Well Chris did as he was told. He got it typed up and sent over about 11:00 in the morning. Well, he just forgot. He was on good relations with the ambassador, he just forgot to mention it to the ambassador. Between one and two o'clock, the ambassador got a call not from Carla Hills but from her deputy, it will come to me, saying the message that we asked Chris to send over to the European Commission, we have changed our minds. We don't want it sent. Of course the ambassador didn't know anything about it because Chris hadn't shown it to him. The ambassador got Chris right up and saw the message. He said, "Well I am glad they didn't want to sent it." Chris told him "I have already sent it." Because of the work habits of the Europeans, Chris got over there probably about 11:30, 11:45. It was put in the box of whoever was supposed to receive it. He could go over about two or two thirty and take it out of the box. Nobody had gotten to it yet. The thing that I want to point out here is the fragility of dealing with new telecommunications technology in trying to develop foreign policy, because this did not go through the State Department. It didn't go through anybody except the deputy U.S. trade representative. Jules Katz is the guy. It went through him. It went through Chris Marsas, the U.S. Trade Rep in Brussels, and it was taken over to the Commission. This is a major problem. Right now, obviously, E-mails are going all over the place, classified, unclassified. What is policy, what is not policy? Is policy only that which comes out in a formal telegram which comes out from the Department of State? Or are there other ways to interpret policy, particularly if you are dealing with a multi-faceted agency approach to policy, because the U.S. Trade Representative's office often has a different view from the Department of Commerce or from the Department of Agriculture, and does State have a view? In my view, speaking of views, the State Department way back in the 70's abandoned its interest in economic and commercial affairs and turned it over to the Department of Commerce. Even in the mid-80's, State was reluctant to get back involved. To put it bluntly, they didn't want to dirty their hands in these types of things. They are more into big policy issues.

Q: I know. There has always been this thrust to get the hell out of consular affairs too.

WILSON: Exactly. State never wanted to get their hands sullied in this case, in the case of Commerce. Now they really have to if they are going to take the lead in foreign policy, as they should. State really is the one place where all this should come together. Now, with modern communications technology, State has to assert itself. Whether it is at the classified or unclassified level, how do you know whether an instruction from Washington that it is U.S. government policy. This causes enormous problems.

I was not there, but it was related to me by the political counselor who stayed behind or who came after I did actually and worked very closely with Ambassador Stu Eizenstadt. There were some negotiations that were going on. The State Department ruled that when these things are happening between the U.S. and the European Community, the European Union, often business representatives are there for the U. S. side, and for the European side as well. These negotiations are going on with the State Department and the Justice Department. Justice is also involved. In fact, I forgot to mention Justice also has an operation there, ruled that the American business people could not talk to each other because that would be in violation of anti-trust, and they couldn't get together and talk. That was the ruling; I'm deadly serious. It was only because Stu Eizenstadt was so plugged into the administration, when he heard about this that he got on the phone to his friends at Justice and State, and they said stop this nonsense. The Europeans talk to each other. Our guys, we have got to talk to each other or we just break off these negotiations because we can't do it. Both Justice and State backed off. But you don't always have a Stu Eizenstadt. You have got to figure out some way to have common sense policy and coordinated policies. I truly hope that the new department under Colin Powell can make some kind of minor breakthrough in these areas, particularly the coordination of policy involving other government agencies. How you do this is to be strong.

Q: Well, when you were there, how did you find it, especially as public affairs counselor? They have got a mission to NATO, a mission to Belgium, and is there another one there?

WILSON: No that's enough.

Q: That's enough.

WILSON: In Geneva we had six (ambassadors). We only had three here.

Q: Well, you were used to this. Would you get together for lunches just to make sure you all were singing the same hymn?

WILSON: That is exactly what happened. There was no organizational structure to achieve this, and so the public affairs officer at NATO and I and the public affairs officer to the kingdom, we would get together and try to coordinate this on the political level with what was going on. It was particularly true with us and NATO because the issues are very similar. We worked extraordinarily closely, and we helped establish some coordinated policies. We tried to establish regular meetings between the political officers in NATO and the political officers to the U.S. Mission to the European Community. It was critical that we would go back with one voice, that we would have one point of view. You are absolutely right. Indeed the public affairs people took the initiative in this.

Q: Well, what was your impression of the staff in the European Community at that time because, particularly I am thinking more on the political rather than the professional side, it seems to have gotten into making too many rules and over-managing.

WILSON: You mean the Commission itself?

Q: Yes.

WILSON: They did some of that. The Brits were particularly distraught about some of the rule making. The French were very distraught about the kind of milk that could go into cheeses. They got the rule making at a very low level, which they probably shouldn't do. One thing they were trying to do, and they have been a little more successful now. When they got successful we began to get cold feet, is to coordinate at the political level and to try to coordinate with NATO on the military level. They have a political directorate, composed of people from the various countries, from all the countries. But because you have so many countries involved, once you make a decision at the European Community, you have to go back to these 15 countries and get approval from their foreign offices for any changes. It is very difficult. One time when this didn't happen, all hell broke loose. It is a good example which will be remembered by people concerned the Balkans. It concerned the breakup of Yugoslavia. For whatever reason, the then German foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher, who according to some of my German foreign affairs colleagues used to carry the foreign affairs portfolio around in his hat or his pocket, wouldn't tell anybody. The German delegation at the European Community was pushing for European, EU, EC, recognition of Croatia. We thought that was a major mistake. Our ambassador to the EC at the time, a man named Tom Niles who had been in Yugoslavia...

Q: I had been his supervising officer at his first post in Belgrade.

WILSON: No kidding! He knew this place well. He knew the then existing ambassador, and he knew Eagleburger.

Q: We had all been together in Yugoslavia. Larry was an economic officer in Belgrade when Tom was there.

WILSON: Okay, interesting. I was in his office one time. He pleaded you have got to try and stop this; it is too premature. It is premature, the "too" is not necessary. But the Europeans rushed ahead.

Q: Particularly the Germans did.

WILSON: Yes, powered by the Germans. No, Powered by Hans Dietrich Genscher. The EC recognized Croatia, big mistake at the time.

Q: And followed rather shortly at the time by the Vatican recognizing Croatia, which as anybody who served in Serbia as I did knew, the Germans and the Vatican had been very nasty players there in W.W.II. This set off all sorts of alarms there.

WILSON: And it should have. Were you there, was a guy named Don Tice there when you were there?

Q: No.

WILSON: Okay, because, anyway I didn't realize you were there the same time Tom Niles was. Interesting situation with Tom Niles. He came with a reputation, he came from Canada, and I had served in Canada. He came with a reputation as ambassador of not really caring about public affairs. As a matter of fact, being anti-public affairs, anti-public diplomacy type stuff. Everyone was terrified. He and I got along extraordinarily well. Not only was he not anti, but he was in favor of expanding things. I mean he saw a "letter from Brussels." People thought he was going to kill it. He loved it; he wanted to keep it going. Secondly he wanted to expand our exchange programs, the International Visitors Program. He was extraordinarily supportive of that because at that point we had maybe five or six people we could send. When the head of the bureau of educational and cultural affairs came through Brussels, Niles went out of his way to give him a lunch and a dinner. Niles is a good politician. He may appear to many people to be cold, but he is not. We lived near each other; we both liked dogs. We got along very well. He was very hospitable to the head of the bureau of education and cultural affairs. He wanted very much to expand the International Visitor's Program. I had come back to Washington to try to accomplish that, and I talked to the head of the European International Visitors Program. I said, "Look, if we could just take two IV's (international visitors) each from Germany, France England, those countries, possibly Italy, they won't miss them because they have 20-25, and we would use them here and it would be very helpful." I got flat turned down. Niles said we will figure out some way of doing it. In the middle of the Uruguay round of trade negotiations that had been going on in Brussels, I got a phone call from the office, because these were held out at the conference center, please get back, please call the head of the bureau of education and cultural affairs. I said, "Look, let me get back to him in a couple of days because of this conference." "No, he wants to talk to you now." So I called him. He said, "We are giving you $100,000 for your IV program." I said, "You are kidding." He said, "No we are giving you $100,000 for the IV program. It's yours." So I went back and I told the ambassador. He was delighted. Two days later when the conference was over, I got all kinds of nasty phone calls from the rest of the bureau of education and cultural affairs. "How could you do this. You are taking our money. You can't do that." I said, "Well, Dr. Glade said it is my money; we can do it. See, if you had given me just the two I wanted from these four countries, it wouldn't have happened. But you brought this on yourselves." They were not happy, but I realized I have got to work with them, so what we did, with Ambassador Niles's approval, was to construct a program where we would take this money and allow the U.S. embassies from these European countries, who were members of the European Community, to select IV's who were particularly involved in European Community affairs. They were; every country had these people. The only thing is we would have to approve them and they would have to come through Brussels for some briefings. So this made everybody happy. We had increased our IV program. The other countries did not lose their IV's. In fact they got to send more. They chafed a little bit at our having to approve, but they got over that very quickly. It worked out extremely well. So we quadrupled the size of our IV program thanks to Tom Niles and thanks to the support that we had from the bureau of educational and cultural affairs.

Q: What sort of things were you doing in the straight public affairs side with dealing with the European Community at that time? How did you deal with it?

WILSON: First of all, you have correspondents of all major European newspapers based in Brussels. Whether it was Swiss papers or French papers or German papers, they were all there. So you dealt with them. You made certain that when they were writing stories about various issues that came up in the European Union, European community, they had the U.S. perspective. I mean, that was clear. Both wire services, Reuters, AP, very important in dealing with them. So you did the traditional press side of the operation very well, not easily, but you had the contacts that you wanted to have. You talked about our cooperating with NATO, we set up a series of seminars once a year with our NATO colleagues, we helped fund it. I later caught hell from my old organization, the inspector general's office because they said that I was screwing around with the money in different fiscal years. We funded three conferences while I was there in England bringing in people not only from Brussels but from European countries to discuss EU and NATO issues, where they joined. These were often not only academics but journalists. At that point, I remember, one of the people we had as a guest speaker from the United States was Condoleezza Rice. She was then on the National Security Council. We had people come over, and we worked this out very nicely. Where I ran into trouble was the conference would usually take place in the spring in England, April, May. If I had money left over from the preceding fiscal year, I would send that money to the organization that was organizing the conference for us, because they had to get mailing lists out. They had to do some mailings in advance, so it was technically legitimate. No question about that. But the IG didn't like that too much. Well we got it done, and there was nothing they could bitch about because technically we were safe. We did do this kind of thing, and we cooperated very strongly between our mission to NATO and the European Union.

Q: Did you find particularly the European Community at that time, the economic side was, of course, sort of what was driving it, wasn't it? I mean at that point. When you start getting into American products and all it is a continuing battle, particularly with the French. Did you find the problem of globalization, which usually means American firms like McDonald's or the Pizza Huts or the food but also other businesses, raises a red flag in Europe, or at least does today. Was it then or not?

WILSON: No. Globalization was not a term that we used at all. I mean, it was not an issue. American films were an issue; American television was an issue, but globalization of other industries was not an issue. Standards were an issue. Is the European Union, the European Community using standards to block imports or this kind of thing? But globalization as such, as you now described it, was not an issue.

Q: How about on movies and such? Basically, the only real powerful movie industry in Europe, maybe I am wrong, other ones had had it but they sort of withered, would be the French. The British, but was there a constant? I mean, did you get involved in this cultural battle?

WILSON: Well, to a small extent yes, but we were involved in distribution of American films. This was where the French were really, "what about subtitles," "what about voiceovers?" that kind of stuff. But American films were pretty much accepted. The French were the ones who were bitching about American culture dominating and taking over. That was their concern. We didn't deal that much with the French from Brussels. I did though, because of a quirk in the USIA staffing, become responsible for the public affairs work in Paris at the OECD. So I would go to France maybe once every three weeks. I would go in and out for the day, which is easy enough to do. Looking back on it, I was too honest. I should have stayed over a couple of nights in Paris. I didn't. I could have because the trains went back and forth very quickly. Now they go even more quickly. It was a good, a nice two and a half hour ride.

What happened was the State Department had pulled out the PAO from the OECD. Margaret Tutwiler liked him, a guy named George Kennedy. Do you know George? So there was no public affairs officer at OECD, public affairs person. Well, there was. The head of the public affairs for OECD was the former USIA person, but nothing for the mission. So I would go. And the PAO in Paris at that time, named Bud Korngold, who is a good friend said he didn't want anything to do with the OECD. He had his own problems and he wanted to deal with them. So I got assigned to the OECD because many of the issues they discussed in the OECD were similar to the issues they dealt with in Brussels. So I became the de facto public affairs officer for the mission to the OECD as well. It only became a little bit difficult when the OECD had its annual general meeting, and all the big wigs coming in, and the speaker or somebody from the OECD coming in for press work in a different area, and I would go in. But I did not get involved in French type things. Whenever I went to Paris, I made a point of seeing the PAO or the IO in Paris, so he would not feel I was stepping on his toes.

Q: Well, you were there '88 to '92 when a small little thing happened. That was essentially the fall of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany. From your working point, did that make any changes or not?

WILSON: I think subtly yes. One of the problems we always face, and if you talk to the people involved they would say the same thing, was the concern that the members of the European Community had, and the Germans in particular, that the Germans should not become too dominant in the community because of the experience that Europe had with Germany. They are extraordinarily competent. It was an unspoken kind of concern, you have got to make sure the Germans don't take over. When German unity came, this fear, this concern, was heightened. It was a very difficult thing for the Community itself. They did not want the Germans to take over all the good jobs, and yet they realized the problems that Germany had economically trying to get the eastern European, Eastern Germany to unify with the rest of the country. Yes, it was a concern to us.

Q: Well you left there in '92. Were there any other major problems or issues that you were dealing with?

WILSON: What I was dealing with then is stuff they are dealing with now. When I came, pasta, the kind of wheat that you have. Some of these issues just don't go away. Yes, they were always there. The agricultural subsidies that the European Commission, European Community, gives to its farmers. A big issue. Major issue. That is not going away. The Europeans, of course, complained about some of our subsidies we give. One person's subsidy is another person's need to exist. I mean the Europeans contend the hallmark of Europe is the small farmer, and they have to keep that small farmer going. These issues did not go away. They are there now.

Q: I was just watching French TV yesterday, and in Brussels the whole place was shut down because farmers came again. I am not sure what the issue was. It was an European issue.

WILSON: When we were there, they came in with their tractors. They shut down the whole place at least twice. We also dealt, of course, with the European Parliament in Strasbourg, though there wasn't a hell of a lot you could do with that.

Q: Well, then you left there in 1992?

WILSON: Yes.

Q: Where did you go?

WILSON: I came back to Washington.

Q: For how long?

WILSON: Well until I retired in 1998.

Q: What were you doing?

WILSON: A lot of different things.

Q: Well, we will pick this up then in 1992, since we have six years to cover we will do this the next time around when you are back in Washington. How's that?

WILSON: Great. That sounds fair.

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Q: Today is March 28, 2001, and we have reached the year of 1992. You came back to Washington, David, what were you up to?

WILSON: I came back to work in the E bureau, education and cultural exchange, an area where I had never worked before. Because I knew the then acting director, he asked me if I wanted to head up a new office.

Q: The acting director...

WILSON: Was a Foreign Service Officer named Barry Fulton, because the director, a political appointee, had left in anticipation of the election. The new office was to be called the office of policy and evaluation. The reason for the new office was about a decade earlier, the E Bureau had an office of policy which was a total fiasco, a total failure. They just determined that it was very difficult to get academic types intellectual types, I will put "intellectual" in quotation marks, types to conform to policy. And policy was a very negative, very bad word, but by combining evaluation of programs with policy, it was thought that we could make some progress. And indeed we did. I agreed to take this on even though it was a very small bureau, a very small subdivision of the bureau. The other office directors, head people, had 30-40 people. I had five or six.

Q: You probably were better off.

WILSON: I probably was better off. The first real issue came when we were trying to decide what initials we should give to this new office. I kind of having a flair for doing out of the box stuff, decided well, hell, they have E and EA, I am going to call my new office EZ. They said "Why EZ?" I said, "Because it is the end of the alphabet. It is the last office that is going to be created. It sounds good." "Well people are going to call it easy." "Whatever they want to call it." After about three weeks the director called me and said, "Do you really want to go with EZ?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well if you really want to, I will go along with it, but I think it is crazy." It has stuck. It is still there. With all the other E this and E that, we have EZ. The next point was finding sort of a deputy for me, and the acting director of the bureau was a little bit apologetic. He had interviewed a couple of people. He said, "I think this person is a very good candidate for you. Why don't you talk with him." His name was Peter Clawson. He said, "Don't be taken back by his looks." I met him and he had a ponytail. Ordinarily, I would have said what the hell. But since the acting director had interviewed him and I respect his judgment, I interviewed Peter. I talked with him, went out to lunch, and I got along very well with him. He was a young officer. He was on the make. He had just been divorced and was getting another wife in Germany, and he was a good person to work with.

Q: What was his experience in the Foreign Service?

WILSON: He had been in either Afghanistan or Pakistan. He had served a tour in Germany and was now back in Washington. But he was fine. He was probably in his mid 30's. He was a good officer. The policy side was more difficult than the evaluation side. The problem with the evaluation side was not that we had trouble with evaluations but that we had trouble getting money for evaluations. People never like to be evaluated. If we did an evaluation it would cost somewhere between ten and thirty thousand dollars. When this office was set up, I began getting calls from people, Dr. this and Dr. that from this university and that university saying could we do evaluations. We do them for AID; we would be glad to do them for you. Well it quickly became apparent that although they said they would like to do them for us, the remuneration was so pitiful compared to what AID paid that nobody from the outside was really interested. AID, I discovered, for an evaluation of a program where you have to go overseas for anywhere from three to five or six weeks, AID pays a minimum of $250,000. Minimum. We were paying a maximum of $25 or $30,000.

Q: Sometimes one gets the feeling, and this is a prejudiced thing, AID had become sort of a milk cow or something for the academic institutions.

WILSON: Well not only academic, but the beltway bandits. There are tremendous amounts of money spent for no reason whatsoever. That was always a problem for us in getting evaluations done. We got involved in a lot of controversial evaluations such as the overseas book translation program. You know, if a post decides it is important for its program to translate a certain book into say, Spanish, and it is agreed by the area officer in Washington, why does it take upwards of 18-24 months to get this thing done? By the time they get this thing done, the CAO who requested it is probably gone. These are the kinds of things we came up with in evaluations. Another thing that we discovered is when a program hires a school or organization to run a particular aspect of this program, let's say they are hired to run the whole program, there was no, and I suspect there still is no ongoing fiscal accountability. Money is doled out on a basis, with a schedule set up in advance, and the program officers don't really now what the hell is going on. The people that are running the program send their reports in to a budget type person who really doesn't care what is going on in the program as long as the budget reports are there. The program officer never sees any of the ongoing reports. There is no responsibility between the program officer and the program that he or she is supposedly running. This was a major problem. When we tried to correct it we ran up against all kinds of entrenched bureaucratic turf fighting. The budget and fiscal people said, no, we have got to have those reports. We don't care about the program officer. The program officers basically said we have so many programs to run we are too busy to look at these reports. Therefore, most of the work was going on helter-skelter, pell-mell, without anyone really checking to see the effectiveness of the result. That was a problem. We reported on it. I am not certain much was done.

Q: I would imagine that as you started doing this, particularly the evaluation side, you would begin to take on a certain amount of the aspect of an inspector, inspector general, and this would not make you overly popular particularly since you were right in the headquarters.

WILSON: Yes. I was certainly outside of the bureau in the first place. I was more on the information side of the operations, more the political side.

Q: The E bureau, what does that mean?

WILSON: Bureau of educational and cultural affairs, which is now ECA in the new Department of State, education and cultural affairs. Up until the late 70's it had been part of the Department of State, and then it was switched over to USIA. In '98-'99 it was switched back into the Department of State.

Q: In this period you were dealing with, what did education consist of?

WILSON: A lot of exchange programs. Whether the international visitors program, Fulbright exchange program, other exchange programs, visitors exchange programs, that's what it consisted of. University to university programs that type of thing.

Q: Speaking, and I am not really sure if it is a prejudice, my gut feeling is this is probably one of the most important things that our government does, getting people over, moving into our society, taking a look how we work. It is very revolutionary because when these people eventually go back over, they have a different appreciation for the United States, and they are also kind of doing things the way we do it.

WILSON: Well, I don't know if they do things the way we do them, but you are actually right. I developed an appreciation for these types of programs because I had been more on the fast information side, and this education program, the effects of these educational and cultural exchange programs are seen only in the medium to longer term. It is not an instant result, and you have to take a little bit on faith that things are going to work out.

Q: Yes, you know, I think the big thing one can look at today is how many mainland Chinese have come to the United States. This has to have had, in the long run, a profound effect.

WILSON: Well, something that I never knew, this has nothing to do with my work. It is my extracurricular activities with my old college. I learned, the college that I had gone to had closed its library school. I was dealing with a lady who was heading the library school out here at the University of Maryland. I was dealing with her for a variety of reasons on a personal level. We had talked about the closing of the library school at Columbia. She said, "That was all political." She then went on to tell me, she gave me one of her cards. One side was in English, the other side was in Chinese. She pointed out that long before the ping pong diplomacy with the Chinese, Columbia University school of library science had an ongoing and extraordinarily effective exchange program with librarians in China. During the Chinese cultural revolution, it was these Columbia University trained librarians that managed to keep some of the material together from being destroyed and various archives, keep it together. You had ping pong diplomacy with Kissinger and Nixon. Long before that you had library diplomacy which I had never known.

Q: I hadn't either.

WILSON: It seemingly has paid off and paid off handsomely. This lady is now the head of the Maryland school of library science and spends a lot of time in the far east and China recruiting students. Quite interesting. But it all stems form this Columbia University exchange program.

Q: Did you get a look at the educational exchange program? I mean was it possible to kind of evaluate it?

WILSON: Well not overall, but the individual program and individual components, sure. Long before I arrived there, the bureau had put out a supposedly annual report on exchange programs, government wide. It was a fiasco. It was a bust. It was three or four years behind. It wasn't really being done. The officer that was running it didn't want to handle it, and so the acting director asked me if I would take this on and put some new life into the annual report. I was very hesitant because I realized it was a tar baby. I didn't know if I could ever get out of it, but because of personal ties and because he said you have really got to help me, I am really stuck on this, I said, "Yes." And I did. And we put out the first new annual report of the cultural and educational exchanges run by the government. Not just by USIA and State Department, but by the whole government. We pulled these things together from agencies across the government. It was remarkable. It was, first of all, the number of exchanges was incredible. People didn't know about a lot of them. We still don't know about a lot of them. When I left the office we were up to, well even now, we were over $2,000,000,000 in government funded exchanges, not with one single agency but with a whole slew of agencies across the government. The greatest exchange programs, of course, at least in the greatest number of dollars came from the Department of Defense. They don't want to talk about it, but they run them. AID runs some. AID isn't even certain what they run. An amusing story, one of the organizations that gets money from the government to run exchange programs is the National Endowment for Democracy. Okay, this is logical. They work for an organization, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the chamber of commerce and the labor group. Unfortunately, money from the congress was funded through USIA. So it was incumbent upon us to see what these organizations were doing. I naturally got ahold of them and said, could you give us a rundown. They said, "We really have no idea. We can't tell you what is going on. We just get the money from you and we funnel it to, we don't know what the hell is happening. You have got to go to the individual organizations and talk to them." It is an example of total irresponsibility in a bureaucracy, but it was not unusual. We had a lot of trouble getting data out of many of the organizations because they feared if we got data out of them we would give it to the congress, and they would get their budgets cut. So this was always a big problem. AID was particularly sensitive in this area. They never wanted to come through and really say what exchange programs they were doing. It was a mess. A couple of times some congressional subcommittees on the House side were investigating AID and its relationship to USIA and exchange programs in Africa. There were major problems. I mean, the political guy who headed the E bureau at the time sort of had to lie to the congress and say, "Oh yes we are cooperating very well with AID and there is no overlap," whereas in truth there was bitter distention. There was bitter fighting. For example, in South Africa AID set up what they called the Mandela Economics Scholars program spending $50,000 per grantee on a very few number of grantees whereas the program that USIA was running was spending $10-$15,000 on an exchangee and being much more effective. But these are the kinds of things you run across.

In any case, we put out our first report. We got a professional organization in Alexandria, Virginia to do the cover. We won for that year the award for the best government publication, art design, and it was very effective. One of the minor ironies of this is when I left the office in 1996 to go over to the office of inspector general as a team leader, one of my old staff called me and said, "Look we are putting out a series of statistics on exchange programs, graphs and charts and things, and would it be all right if we used the cover from this report?" I said, "Sure, because it is our report and we have the rights to it." Well, the cover showed in a very abstract way, dancers. The then counselor of the USIA, a newly minted counselor, a woman named Ann Sigmund. I won't characterize her except to say, well I won't characterize her because she is now the deputy inspector general. But she is singularly lacking in a sense of humor. I will leave it at that. She does not like libraries and that type of operation. In any case, this report that we were putting out, my old office was putting out, came across her desk. She saw it, at least. She was outraged. She said, "How can you put out a report like this showing dancers? You can't send it to the congress." By that time, my office had already sent it to the congress. She said, "this looks like what a bunch of pansies would do, you can't send a report with dancers on it to the congress. You have got to show that we are hard nailed, tough guys," which is a ridiculous approach. It was fine. We had absolutely no trouble with it. When I left, the office was expanded. It got a lot more funding. We didn't have to go begging every time to the office of the director to get money for this evaluation or that evaluation. The office was given a couple of million dollars, and it was going strong ever since.

One little aspect of this office, again, because they didn't know where to put it. There is a little organization known as the cultural property committee. No one wanted to have any responsibility for it. When I had been up to the deputy director's office, I mediated a couple of disputes between the head of that office and her deputy. Each of them came from different political parties and it was a problem. So when I was in this new EZ office, they said, "Hey could you take this on? We don't know where else to put it; take it under your wing." I said, "sure." Because I had enjoyed that, and indeed we did do a lot of good work with the cultural property advisory committee protecting cultural property at the request of countries who asked that their cultural patrimony be protected from sales in the United States, this type of thing. It was very useful.

Q: Could you give an example of the sort of thing that you would be doing?

WILSON: Well the committee consisted of about seven or eight private individuals, and they would meet. For example, Italy comes in with a request to save certain objects, to say that they can't be imported. They come in with supporting data. The cultural property advisory committee meets. They examine the data and then they will go back and ask for more data, more details. It goes back and forth for three or four years. If, indeed, their criteria are satisfied, they then issue a draft regulation which then has to go through the State Department. It is part of the State Department, actually, so it is all right. A ban might or might not be placed on the importation of certain cultural objects.

Q: Did they get involved at all in trying to get museums or collectors to return things?

WILSON: Well, they were involved a little bit in that, yes. One of the problems that we found was that a member of the cultural property advisory committee, they are usually fairly wealthy individuals because they collect themselves, had donated certain objects to the Williams College art museum. Somebody was up there, and they said, "Hey, this stuff is not kosher. We don't know the provenance of this stuff." So there was a lot of debate going on. The person who was on the committee quietly resigned.

The other thing they were getting into, that the State Department was into now, is if a foreign country sends a piece of art over for exhibit, who is to guarantee that some American citizens aren't going to bring suit to keep it? These are ongoing issues that the cultural property advisory committee expanded from one person to three people. It was a growing concern. It is now at State. I don't know where it is under. No one really wants it because it is one of those oddball operations, but every now and then it gets into the news, and it is very important. A lot of the protection was from Latin American countries, from Peru, from the Andes, for some Aztec object, you know, it is just various areas.

Q: Well then in '96 you left this part of the E bureau.

WILSON: Yes. Well, before that, just something that should be noted historically. Back in '94, I had been asked by the director of human resources, personnel for USIA to head up a promotion panel from the 1 to the OC level.

Q: Which is basically from colonel to brigadier general. It is an important jump.

WILSON: Yes, it really is. I, at the time, was an MC and I said that was fine, sure.

Q: MC being minister counselor.

WILSON: Yes. And meanwhile, the year's promotion list came out, and five women who were at the 1 level who felt they should be at the OC level brought suit against the director of personnel, against the Information Agency saying they were discriminated against because of sex, gender. Okay, I was paying somewhat close attention to this, and I talked to people who headed the panel before, and I got to know the pitfalls. One day the director of personnel came into my office and closed the door. I had a little office, about the size of this room. Okay, I don't need a big office. He said, "Look, I have got to ask you something. You know, I went to Stanford, and I am a WASP. I am really being hit by this suit. I am going to ask you to step aside as chairman of the panel. I need to appoint a woman. I have got to appoint a woman Foreign Service Officer. It is just too much pressure." So, what could I say. I stepped aside. A woman was appointed chairman of the panel, and lo and behold in the next round all five officers who brought suit got promoted. Isn't that surprising. That really knocked my socks off; I was flabbergasted. A year later in the fall of '95 they asked me if I would chair the panel again in the spring of '96. I said I would, and I did. It worked fine except that one of the difficulties was that that was the year they had very little money, and so whereas in the past years the promotions in USIA from 1 to OC numbered anywhere plus or minus 15, in this year we were not told in advance, but it was generally known, the number of promotions was seven. That made it very difficult, extremely difficult, because we did not know in advance where the cutoff would be but we did know that it was going to be lower. Even then there was considerable pressure to promote one person who was very good, at least on paper. She was an African American. If you looked at the comments that were made about her you could not have helped but promote her. Indeed, she was promoted. A decision that I regret, but then again given the facts as they were laid out, there was nothing that we could do about it. She merited promotion. It then turned out that she had written all of her stuff herself, and had people sign them. She was very limited in her experience. She had experience in Africa. They assigned her to western Europe because her husband was not a government employee. He was in London. She was an utter disaster where she was. But they were waiting to make the assignment until they saw she got promoted. There was no direct pressure, but certainly indirect pressure to promote this woman. We did, and it was a mistake. Again, looking at the record as it laid in front of us, you could not help but promote her. And promotion or not, it is not an individual decision. The panel was four people, and you had to make those decisions. In any case, after this panel experience, I went over to the office of the inspector general.

Q: This was essentially from '96 to '98.

WILSON: From the fall of '96, from September of '96 to November of '98. I went over as a team leader.

Q: Meaning what?

WILSON: Meaning I was heading an inspection team, my team. I was the first USIA originated team leader that the OIG ever had, the inspector general's office ever had.

Q: By this time, I can't remember, was USIA amalgamated into the State Department?

WILSON: No, but we knew it was going to be. I mean it was up on the Hill, and the amalgamation didn't take place until the fall of '99, but everything had been set into place for it to happen. So I went over. I had a lot to learn. I didn't have that much to learn about the State Department operation. That I knew, but I had to learn about how the OIG conducted itself and what you did, etc. I learned from my deputy, a senior State Department officer who was a bit of a curmudgeon.

Q: Who was that?

WILSON: A guy named Gary Sutton. I had an admin person on my team. I think I had two admin people on my team. I had a consular officer and a USIA officer. It was a good team. Of course being my first time out, we did the eastern Caribbean including Trinidad Tobago, Guyana, one other place. It was an experience for me. It was quite an experience, particularly when I got to Trinidad, where there was a political ambassador who had replaced a career ambassador. The political ambassador was from the Boston area. I am from Massachusetts, so we talked a lot. I tried to win him over a little bit. He was having a lot of trouble with his consular officer. The dispute, the problems had gotten to the level of the director general. There were major problems with the consular officer reporting to the medical department of State that the ambassador was unfit to serve as ambassador. A lot of things were going on.

Q: This was more personality than...

WILSON: Yes, I think it was personality. The consular officer was accused of lesbianism. She wanted to adopt some Trinidadian children. She said the Ambassador had let the Trinidadians know of her sexual preferences. It was a mess; believe me it was a mess. To boot, she was a personal friend of my deputy. It was not an easy situation. In any case, one of the problems was that this ambassador was very pigheaded and strong. He had done a lot of good things. He saw the need to interdict drugs coming in, boats that would then go up to the States from Colombia, stopping over in Trinidad and then going up. He had a good sense about the economics of the country. But we had to say in the report that he was making progress, had done a lot of good things here and there, but there were these personnel problems and he had to recognize them. Well, he looked at this report, a team leader has to write a report, an inspection evaluation report on the ambassador and DCM. There was no DCM at that point, so it was on the ambassador that I wrote it. You write it in conjunction with your team, but you deal with the ambassador on it. He looked at this, and he was furious. He said, "I will not sign this. I will not sign this if you put a gun to my head." Here I was, this was the first one I had ever written. I didn't know what the hell to do. I said, "Okay, if you won't sign it, I will just make a note that you refused to sign it. What else can I do?" That is what happened. I came back to Washington. The OIG officer said, "That's fine." These reports on political appointees supposedly could go to the White House. It never happened.

Q: No, nobody gives a damn.

WILSON: That's right. I mean he had talked about the fact that when he came in, he came in from the eastern part of Massachusetts, from the Brockton area. He said he really wanted Ireland as a post to be ambassador. He had been a former Congressman who had been defeated. He said, "Teddy Kennedy called and said, no, Jean Smith has Ireland. You stay out of that."

Q: That of course, was Kennedy's sister.

WILSON: That's right. So he said that he stayed out of it. In the first inspection there were a couple of other amusing problems. In one of the countries, we had an ambassador who had just left, and a DCM who had just left. They did not get along. They were both career people. It turned out, and I won't use names, it turned out that the ambassador, after he left, he left early. He hadn't brought his wife out with him, because they were having problems. He had been assigned to the office of the inspector general; they like to get ambassadors in that operation. Well, one of the things we quickly discovered was that the DCM, who I won't get into more details, but he bears your last name was not the greatest guy in the world, was not the most honest guy in the world. The ambassador was not getting along. There were shouting matches in the hall. There were major personnel problems, not the least of which were the fact that Foreign Service nationals people in the community knew that the ambassador was fooling around with prostitutes. He had one in particular, I don't know if she was a prostitute, but she was staying at the residence. There were all kinds of problems. He was frequenting bars that the security officer had put off bounds for embassy people and marines. He was using his car to take several of his people around. He had a favorite hotel where he would go if he didn't go to the residence. It was a very delicate situation. We are talking about a country of 800,000 people, and the American ambassador in Georgetown stands out. Let's be honest. It was a very difficult situation, and what I had to do because we didn't have a secure line, I had to call the deputy inspector general and say, "Look, I'll explain more when I get back, but this person should not come into the inspector general's office. It would not be good. There are too many problems, and I will explain when I get back," which I did. I came across my notes the other day listing the points I wanted to make. Ironically the first point that I made was this gentleman represents the President of the United States, and he is known to represent the President of the United States. You cannot have him doing these things. Little did I know that he represented the President a lot more than I did.

Q: We are talking about President Clinton and his impeachment and Monica Lewinski and all that stuff.

WILSON: Yes. Ironically the very first point that I wanted to make from my talking points with the Inspector General is this man as ambassador represented the President of the United States, and you can't have him doing this. He represented the president literally. As it turned out, he did not come in to the OIG. He was supposed to leave the government, but as those things go, he didn't. He stuck around. Same with an admin officer in Trinidad who was really bad. He was a decent admin officer but he called his local employees monkeys. It was a mess. We had a history of statements from various people of the tensions he had caused. We recommended that he be removed from the service. And indeed that did not happen either because a year ago when I was walking in the Department I saw him walking around the Department. He is still there. It is very frustrating because he certainly should have been, but nobody had the guts to do this. More importantly, before we went out on the inspection, I and the deputy leader talked to the director general, which is where these problems are centered. We talked to the director general because of the problem between the ambassador and the consular officer. When we came back and reported back to the director general about this admin officer, it turned out that he had been admin officer in Latin America at a post where this director general had been ambassador, and the director general knew all about him. He never mentioned it to us in advance. I said, "Why didn't you do something?" "Well there are too many other things to do." He didn't do anything.

Q: You are pointing to a really frustrating problem. Again and again I have talked to people who have known of Foreign Service Officers, I am talking about professionals, who really are disasters. I mean, either because of their personal conduct or because of their prejudices or even almost criminal activities, sometimes maybe even criminal activity. And yet, the system is not able to pick them up, chew them up, and spit them out. They conceal, and particularly if they happen to call themselves a minority or a gender case, but even on the straight white male type things. I mean if you want to dig your heels in, you can stay, collect the money and be almost untouched.

WILSON: That's right. I had a couple of colleagues who did that who should have been out a long time ago, but stayed in. They weren't doing anything. They were stuck way over in the west wing. That is exactly what happens. But in the inspector general's case, he should have told us in advance this guy's problems, and the officer should have been out. Anyway, it didn't happen.

When I met with the inspector general and some of her staff about this ambassador in Georgetown, I must have gone through three or four talking points. To show you the mentality, somebody on her staff said, "Well you mean he was actually picking this woman up in his ambassadorial car?" "Yes." "They were sending the car for her?" "Yes." This gives an idea of the mentality, this person said, "We could get him for misuse of government vehicles." I said, "No, I am not going to get into that kind of crap." I mean, we are talking about a much bigger picture than misuse of government vehicles. But I mean it was that kind of mentality. It just floored me. He misused the government vehicle, but a lot of people do. But that wasn't the issue. The issue was broader based issue, and it continues to be.

We also had a case at one of the posts, probably this first inspection, where we had a DCM who had just left, and she was very good at the consular side of things, and they had a big problem in the consular section, major fraud going on. She didn't pick it up. She didn't supervise it terribly well. We had said this, and she came in and she complained because I had known her personally. I had worked with her. She had complained that it was my deputy that didn't like her, that this was a bad report and was going to ruin her reputation or corrode her reputation. I said, "Well nobody is going to see it. It doesn't really matter." She cried. She is a good officer, still in the service. You know, she went in and complained to the inspector general and cried. What can I tell you. But the report stood up, and I still talk to her. Nobody really saw it; it doesn't really matter.

In my next round of inspections, I went off to the Balkans while things were heating up, during the winter so we couldn't be accused of taking a vacation. We were very concerned about safety, but we did it. We did Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, when things were, well Macedonia hadn't hotted up yet, but it was the last of the former Yugoslav republics to break away. In their main square they still had a statue of Tito up, which was interesting. One of the things we recommended in Macedonia was that the Voice of America stop broadcasting into Macedonia in the Albanian language, or in the alternative start broadcasting into Macedonia in the Macedonian language. This recommendation was made because the foreign minister...

Q: Oh, you were pushing the button with the Greeks, but go ahead.

WILSON: Well, yes, we know that. In fact it is not Macedonia, it is the FYROM. Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. That is the name that you officially have to call it. But at that time a good friend of mine, Tom Niles, was the ambassador to Greece, so we talked. I was going to go down to see him, but direct air transportation had been cut off. You had to go a roundabout way, and I couldn't do that. There wasn't the time. But in any case, the foreign minister asked the ambassador to stop this broadcasting in Albanian. We put that as part of our recommendation. The reason, of course, the VOA was broadcasting in Albanian was since the start of the Cold War they had an Albanian service, they had Albanian refugees. They didn't have any Macedonian refugees. They were not about to stop. The director of USIA at the time, a guy named Joe Duffy, not among the stronger directors USIA has ever had, in fact probably among the two or three weakest, or weaker, told the inspector general, "I am very glad this recommendation is in. Help me get the Voice to do something; I can never get them to do anything I want them to do," which is true. It didn't have any effect until believe it or not, last April. Last April because of what was going on, the Voice suddenly instituted a Macedonian service. I would like to think we were responsible for that. I realize that we probably weren't, but it was our recommendation that it be done.

Q: I am surprised, because I am an old Balkan hand going back to the 60's. Usually as soon as you start talking about Macedonian, which is essentially a dialect of Bulgarian, not Serbian, it is a dialect. But this gets very hot. The Greeks go ballistic claiming that there is no such thing as a Macedonian language. I even had a Greek person at their embassy in Belgrade, when I casually mentioned I spoke some Macedonian, told me I was crazy, and he meant it. Was this an example of the Greek lobby being so strong in the United States.

WILSON: It is only outdone by a couple of other lobbies that are strong, but the Greeks are very strong. In any case, the ambassador, Christopher Hill, was a very strong very good ambassador. He is now back here doing something with that area. Anyway they wanted him to come back and head up one of the parts of the Department that was dealing with this whole Balkan crisis. He did not; he stayed there, and now he is back. He is the one that when Holbrooke was going in and out, he was at Holbrooke's side. Spoke the language. His brother was a political officer in Serbia. His father had been a missionary and had been brought up in the Balkans. Good ambassador. It was one of the better run posts that we had come across. He had a very good sense of feel with the government, with the dissidents. He had some UN, you know the white vehicles running around at the time. You had an American presence, three or four hundred American soldiers rotating in and out from Germany.

Q: Looking at those areas, Macedonia, particularly in this time, how was our embassy, because so many of these things were sort of put in on the cheap and all that? How did you find it?

WILSON: It was good. It had moved to a location just outside of town. It was a good embassy that was well run. It was in decent shape. We complained about the fact that USIS had moved out there. They had done that to save money, to move in with the embassy. It was also more protected, but it was also more exclusive and harder for people, Macedonians, to come and go to use the library and things. It was not a good place for USIS. It wasn't a new building, but it was a new embassy, and it was in good shape.

Q: How about in Croatia? How did you find things there?

WILSON: The embassy was very tight. It was a consulate that had been converted into an embassy, and space was a major problem. But let me get to that later. Serbia was the old embassy in Yugoslavia. A big place. Still, when we were there it was hard to get from one place to the other. You had to walk on the outside. It was kind of disastrous sometimes. It had an extremely strong and good ambassador named Dick Miles, one of the better ambassadors I have encountered. it was his third tour there. He had been there as a JO (junior officer), as something else, now he was back as ambassador. Spoke the language, knew the people. His wife did the same thing. Extremely well run embassy.

Q: There must have been quite a bit of tension wasn't there, because Milosevic, this was really close to the time when they stirred up things in Kosovo.

WILSON: Well yes, a little bit before. We had a USIS operation in Kosovo, in Pristina. We had a cultural center which was established under Secretary Christopher without consulting with USIS, but with the support of Milosevic, providing, and this is one of the ironies, providing that the government agreed to reopen its cultural center in the center of Belgrade down near the university. We had closed this because Ann Sigmund didn't think we needed that kind of operation. Milosevic gave us permission to open the center in Pristina on the condition that we reopen this one in Belgrade, and he gave it to us rent free for about three years. It was very nice. We knew how important a post near Pristina would be. Now, one of the problems we ran into of course, was that the PAO in Pristina did not bring his wife, and he took up with an Albanian beauty on the side. That was a slight problem.

Q: As an inspection team, I mean, everybody is getting looser and looser in things, and supposedly what you do on the side is not important, but this obviously is. I mean how did you view something like this?

WILSON: We did not put anything in the inspection report. He was not doing anything that seemed to violate security. That is all I can say. We didn't mention anything about it. It was generally known, I mean, this woman was at diners with the Ambassador when he came down to Pristina. He was married back home; that was known. I mean, she was supposedly his language teacher. All right. What can I tell you; she taught a lot of languages. But one of the things we were concerned about, we wanted to get a secure phone link between the embassy in Belgrade and the USIS operation in Pristina. We ran into enormous opposition both from the security people in the embassy because of cost and from USIS saying that we don't deal with secure phone lines on our premises, and we don't accept that, which is a dumb position.

Q: Yes, sort of like the extra pure, wasn't it?

WILSON: Yes, we had a report, we put it in the central part of the report. After about four months, USIS caved in and said we could do it. It took the State Department another seven months to come up with the funding to put it in, saying it is not going to be secure. It could be compromised. Yes, it could be, but at least get something. Otherwise the only way you could communicate was to drive four hours from Pristina to Belgrade. Anyway, that was a little triumph we had. It took a while for it to materialize, but it did materialize.

The ambassador was very close to many members of the opposition. He had his problems with Mr. Milosevic and Mr. Milosevic's wife, and two other people who were really running the country. We found there was a difficulty in reporting. They weren't coordinating and they weren't talking to each other in who was getting which stuff. It was a bit of a problem. I assume it is overcome by events; I don't know. Let's get into Croatia first.

Q: Wait a minute, let's, before we leave Belgrade, was it a hostile situation there? I mean this is the time I guess when the students, there were demonstrations against Milosevic?

WILSON: Yes, there were. In fact, I walked alongside a couple of them. I was careful. I probably shouldn't have, but I did.

Q: Well, I would think you would have sort of a two faced embassy, an embassy where government facilities were really sort of closed to them, but at the same time you had certainly some of the intellectual side and the opposition falling all over themselves to keep in touch with the embassy. How would you define it?

WILSON: Well, yes, that was true. It was a dichotomous situation. The ambassador dealt with Milosevic, very harshly at times. He told him certain things that he wanted. To save time if the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, sent him a message the ambassador considered too harsh for purposes, he wouldn't hesitate to go back and tell her this. That was part of the coordination that I did not like or we did not like. When they were drafting stuff, the position to send to Milosevic, they didn't consult the embassy. They presented the embassy with a fait accompli. Wrong! I mean the ambassador had the courage to go back and say this shouldn't be done. He was told go back and do it. He did it. But the embassy was not consulted in development of a position.

Q: Well in talking about this, I mean, this is an era that I am not too familiar with. I am told that by this time the E-mail process had sort of really taken over so there could be what amounts to quite a bit of consultation. They were planning to send you the following instructions. What do you think before they come up, or had this arrived at all?

WILSON: No not at all. No there was no consultation in any way.

Q: But was this happening in other places?

WILSON: No. In fact as far as I was concerned in '97, in the winter and spring of '97, no. I did not see this at all.

Q: Were you finding in, I mean, from your glimpse of the foreign policy apparatus, this obviously was a key place at the time, that policy was, you know, instructions and all this were sort of being issued sort of at the Secretary of State level without really bringing in the experts? I mean, this is more sort of the Washington operators who want to look like they are being tough.

WILSON: Yes. I mean there were a couple of people, Bob whatever his name was, they were consulted. But the desk people and the country directors were not really involved. As I said, the ambassador certainly was not consulted in the making of policy. That bothered us. We said so. It didn't matter, but we said so. That was about it in Serbia. There were not a large number of American journalists there yet because things really hadn't heated up. In Croatia, we had a lot of trouble because we couldn't fly directly from Serbia to Croatia. You had to go up by Europe and come back. I don't know if that has changed. The ambassador to Croatia at the time was a former democratic staffer on the foreign relations committee named Peter Galbraith. He was both hated and more hated by the professionals. I got along with him.

Q: I am interviewing him. He is away now. He is off on OSC something somewhere, but he is coming back, and so I will continue interviewing him.

WILSON: Well if you do talk to him, give him my best. I got along well with Peter. He did not refuse to sign his efficiency rating. He was very good about it. He was not nearly so harsh as his reputation, which preceded him, was. And I know from dealing with the deputy director's office in USIA, he was the nemesis of USIA on the Hill. On the other hand, when he was out there as ambassador, he was probably the strongest supporter of public diplomacy, public affairs, that I have ever seen. In fact, when as I mentioned, the embassy was in an old consulate building, there were a lot of space problems, they were remodeling, etc., and my two admin people in their draft recommendation recommended that the USIS library was too big and the USIS space was too much and should be cut back by almost 50%. The ambassador said, "No way, if anything it should be enlarged." Of course, being a team leader I could do anything I wanted, and we did not put that recommendation in. On the contrary, we needed to put in a recommendation for larger space when we got back. But Peter truly liked what public diplomacy was doing, and in fact he put the public affairs officer who was a good officer on his special working team along with the number two political officer and somebody else in the consular section who were his favorites. They really developed policy. There were major problems, as you probably have heard, between the ambassador, Peter Galbraith, and the CIA station. Major problems.

Q: What were the issues? Can you talk about them?

WILSON: It is hard to get into, but there were major problems. I mean the director of the agency came out. That is how bad it was. On the inspection side, our deputy inspector general who was in charge of relations with the CIA, a guy named John Wyatt, came out. It was a severe situation.

Q: Well, I know there were newspaper articles about shipments of arms and things of this nature that, I mean, there was great debate. I am not sure it continues because the focus has shifted.

WILSON: The station chief sent an individual to the States on some programs, didn't tell the ambassador. Various things of that kind. I mean, just getting the station chief and the ambassador to talk to each other was a major accomplishment. When we left, we thought we had accomplished that, and we really had, but then within three months the thing went sour again.

Q: Tudjman was considered, along with Milosevic, those were the two key players in causing the disaster that Yugoslav internal policy caused, I mean maybe not caused the split up, but made it as appalling as it was.

WILSON: Well, it was, but Tudjman was very needed by us in the whole Bosnian affair in Bosnia, so we were treating him very well. There was a couple of areas in dispute. Ambassador Galbraith showed a lot of political courage physically going out there and telling the Croatians they had to accept the Serbs in this situation. There was a time when the Croatians were fooling around with Serb tractors, and the ambassador was on one of the tractors. He dragged me and one of my team mates out there. It was a pretty hairy situation. I have a picture of myself in a Ukrainian helicopter in the middle of a thunderstorm. We did it. I am glad I am back here to talk to you. He showed good political courage and physical courage. We were very impressed with him. But I don't really want to get into the problems between the ambassador and CIA station.

Q: How did he get along? He is obviously an activist. I had only covered the senatorial side when he was having a wonderful time sort of making policy.

WILSON: Yes, screwing everybody up.

Q: Oh yes. But how did he get along with some of the State Department Foreign Service side?

WILSON: Well he calmed down a lot. He got married. It was his second or third wife. They had a child. He took on a different persona from the Peter that was here on the hill. He and I had a close mutual friend, maybe that helped me get along with him. But I truly liked him a lot. I mean it was a very jaundiced view of when he was up on the Hill and I was in the deputy director's office. But seeing him in action and working with him for 21/2 or 3 weeks on the inspection, I respect him. I respected his political judgment. I respect his courage, physical courage.

Q: How did you find the relations with State Department, instructions and all this? This was a tricky time.

WILSON: We discussed that, Peter and I, and he said that he never flaunted instructions, that he followed them. He may follow them in his own way but he followed them. He did not flaunt them; he did not burn them. He did not say that he just paid no attention to them. What he did say though, was very interesting. He said often he found a vacuum in policy, and he, Peter Galbraith the ambassador, did not hesitate to fill that vacuum. I respected that; he did a good job. I know there was a policy vacuum at least out of the Department that was very hard. So I mean he followed the instructions. He did not flaunt them. He saw a vacuum, and he filled it.

Q: Yes, and then you don't report back. You just do what you feel you need. You don't ask for advice at a certain point.

WILSON: He filled the vacuum.

Q: Yes. Then when you came back, how did you feel, who was the inspector general, and how did you feel, I think it was a woman. How did you feel she dealt with her teams and the recommendations and all?

WILSON: There is a big long process in the inspector's office. It is changing now. They have made a whole new setup which I consider grossly ineffective. I won't get into that because it is not my business anymore. But she handled it well. It was very bureaucratic. It would take months, four or five months for an inspection report to get all the clearances and get out. What else can I say. I'll give you a better example. When I also inspected Korea.

Q: All right let's talk about Korea.

WILSON: Korea, I had a new deputy, a man named Dick Tierney who was a former Foreign Service Officer who was very good. Extraordinarily good. Very competent at using computers. One of the things that both Dick and I pride ourselves on was that even though the Korean inspection was very important, it was a big post, we were determined to keep the inspection report under 50 pages. That was a major job, and we did it. Our other posts that were small, the inspection report was easy to keep under 50 pages. But many of the inspection reports go on and on with irrelevancies. I mean, nobody pays any attention to them. I mean, you read the "key" findings, and that is a word I told you I hate in government. I never use it because ever since my fourth or fifth year in government, those things that are important are considered "key," key contacts, key ideas, key findings. They have got to be a little bit more something than the word key. In any case, we kept our Korea inspection report under 50 pages. That was a deliberate decision, and we did it. Dick Tierney was very good. We added a second admin inspector, that was fairly important in a place like Korea. We had a chargï¿½, not an ambassador. The political ambassador had left a chargï¿½ who was in charge, Dick, his name escapes me. This raised a very interesting point. He had been in Korea in the Peace Corps. He had, if you count the Peace Corps, this was his fourth tour in Korea. He knew the language; he knew what was going on. He knew the people. He knew the head of the Korea CIA. He knew the President. He knew the people personally. They had known him from way back. Very important. One of the problems that we cited in our report was what should the Department do about a post like Thailand or Korea or China, or Russia for that matter, where you have a vast cultural difference from the United States and language difficulties, and language barriers. Should someone specialize in this as a career and stay specialized in that with occasionally, very occasionally, be moved into something else, or does this make the person too "pro" the country in which they are specializing, and therefore their advice becomes suspect? It is a very good question. There is no right or wrong answer. You don't know how to deal with it. The Department, from a personnel perspective, isn't going to really put people specializing in Korea, we are going to promote you because you know the language and you have done a very good job. You know the people; your advice is important. Their advice is important, but automatically the policy makers and political people, if they see this guy has specialized in Korea for 18 years, think, well, you know, he is leaning too much toward the Koreans. It is a problem, how you deal with it, I don't know. You also have a situation the reverse of this, because of internal politics within the Department, they named as head of the political section a person who had no Korean experience at all, no Korean language. Because they had to do something with him, they gave him two years in Korea. He was not very good. I mean good officer but he couldn't deal with the subject.

Q: Korean is, it ranks up among the top two or three of the most difficult languages.

WILSON: Sure.

Q: Because, I mean, there are all sorts of qualifiers and all that.

WILSON: He couldn't really deal with the situation. That's ironic. Well, in any case these are issues where there is no answer, no right or wrong answer. You just have to see where you are going. The PAO in Korea, had also been in the Peace Corps. This was only his third tour, but he and the chargï¿½ were effective, because they knew the people, they knew the country, they knew the language. Did they go too far overboard? I don't know. One of the things the chargï¿½, and I strongly agreed on, Christianson was his name, we agreed on the importance in an embassy of telephone operators, human beings. One of the real complaints I had when I was in Brussels was that the admin office for all the three missions in Brussels went to an automatic telephone answering system, which is frustrating as hell in a place like Belgium because you had to have everything in English, French, and Dutch. That wasn't so great. By the time you connected with a person, if you are calling from long distance, it has already taken you two or three minutes. In Korea they maintained a rank of Korean-English speaking telephone operators who were smart enough and well paid enough to know where to direct your call, to whom to direct your call. One of the strong recommendations we made is they should keep this type of operation going, not try to automate the phone system because the phone people are the first contact with your host country. Very important. His name was Dick Christianson, the chargï¿½. He agreed with me totally on that. We cited keeping this in our report on best practices, in spite of strong pressure form the Department to cut costs. We said you could cut costs in other places. We had a major consular problem in the operation. It stemmed from a group of former USIA people who were brought into the State Department because they might have been ousted from USIA. We ran into one of these guys in the consular section, and he was a real screw-up. I mean he truly was. It was bad. One of the things that had happened was they had lost 10,000 visa forms. A big deal.

Q: Absolutely because these validate a visa.

WILSON: On the black market in the Far East these things would be worth a lot of money. We figured they would be worth at least $100,000-$200,000, at least. My consular inspector found that what had happened. They had one box, and there were supposedly four other boxes missing. We didn't know where they were. This guy in the consular section didn't pay any attention. The consul general, who was a favorite of the head of the consular section in the Department, so no one was going to say anything against her, and she later got an ambassadorship, let this roll off her back. She was responsible for it. No one was going to say, she was good, she should have been responsible for this. In any case, my consular inspectors discovered that Seoul is right near Santiago in the mail pigeonhole setup in the department. Four of these visa form boxes were placed in the Santiago...

Q: Oh you mean just how things are sent.

WILSON: Yes, and Santiago got these things. They realized it wasn't for them. They sent E-mails to the Department and to Seoul. Nobody paid any attention to them. So for months these missing visa forms are sitting in Santiago. Santiago didn't care. When we got there and started pushing, somebody found the E-mail that was sent. Maybe it was a telegram, I don't remember. It might have been a telegram because it went to both Seoul and Washington. We found them, and they took care of it. That was extraordinarily lax administration.

Q: Oh, yes, on the part of the consular section. How about fraud? Were you looking for fraud or malfeasance or the like in Seoul in the consular operation?

WILSON: Not really, but in another section we were. One of the problems in the consular section was that most of the consular officers are first tour, maybe second, didn't speak the language, so they needed an Korean interpreter. They had maybe 30-40 seconds to make a decision in a case. The ambassador set up a system whereby if there were political issues involved it would be cleared through the political section. This caused some problems.

Q: I am grimacing at that because I was consul general in Seoul back '76-'79. It is not a good idea.

WILSON: No, and this caused some other problems. But on the other hand, when the son of the minister of justice wants to go over to the United States as a tourist, he had the bank account etc., but he is turned down, I mean...

Q: Yes, you have got to have a way of looking at it.

WILSON: We said there should be no special considerations. Obviously there is always the exception here, the exception there. But the consular section is one of the more important sections of any embassy because you have contact with the Foreign Service host country nationals. You have got to deal with them properly. We had problems with visa lines in the Caribbean. You just can't leave people out standing around. You have got to pay attention to their needs. You have got to pay attention to the public relations aspect. In Korea they had visa lines. There were often press stories on the length of the visa lines, etc. The consular section was responsible for the emergency evacuation plan and the coordination with DOD. That needed a lot of...

Q: And it is a real threat because something could happen.

WILSON: They needed a lot of pulling up of the socks on that one, how that was going to go. But the more interesting situation developed just a couple of days before we left. One of our admin inspectors received a tip. He was told that the commissary - there was an embassy commissary, and you had four classic liquor stores on base. You had 37,000 military stationed there close around Seoul. Some were in; some not. The embassy commissary could not account for a shipment of 1,200 cases of Mogen David wine.

Q: Which is not exactly a best seller on the open market I don't think.

WILSON: Well, the Koreans apparently like sweet wines, and this is considered an elixir. There were four black market rings operating out of the commissary, usually the wives of military who had relatives off in the boondocks. They were forced into this. They did a lot of stuff. One of the first indications we had was in our admin inspection, when one of our admin people, our chief admin officer, who is really superb, he is still working, a guy named Allan Barenson, really good. He learned that the tip box, at the checkout of the commissary there is a tip box, that the tip box was pulling in about $3,000 to $5,000 a month in tips. Okay, well, it gives you some idea of what is going on. In any case, we got back to Washington. There was a flurry of E-mails. After about a week or ten days, we got an E-mail, a very proud E-mail saying we have located the missing 1,200 cases, and only two cases were broken, and you will be pleased to know that from the time we put this on the shelf in the first week, 700 cases were sold. Isn't that interesting. We turned this over to the investigators. They weren't really interested in this. They did a little bit of investigating. They called the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. We learned through them, through our investigators in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms that from a little place in California called Ripon, California, that between January of 1997 and July of 1997, there had been shipped to the embassy in Seoul, Korea 150,000 bottles of Mogen David wine. 150,000 bottles! It may have been closer to 145,000 but it was X number of cases times four or five shipments, a shipment varying between 1,000 and 1,200 cases in a shipment. I said, even at Passover time in the Catskills, you are not going to consume that much Mogen David wine. One of the little ironies was the admin inspector who had first discovered this, was leaving our team once he got back to Washington. I did give her a little going away party. I went to find some Mogen David wine. I couldn't find any. I finally found some way out in Silver Springs somewhere. Obviously I couldn't find it; it was all in Korea. I am sure they had it somewhere else. You know, I asked our investigators, I said, "You know, this is probably the tip of the iceberg. There is probably a lot of alcohol going the same route." They had other things to worry about. They never worried about it, but it was rather amusing, 150,000 bottles of Mogen David wine in a six month period shipped to the embassy in Seoul. Obviously some American GSO or assistant GSO, somebody had signed for the damn thing. Somebody had to know it was going in. It wasn't just the head of the commissary who was the problem, and he was. He had the problem you see, he had been in several commissary jobs in southeast Asia. He had been fired. He gets picked up. No one wanted to have any trouble, so they kept him on. You know it is the same thing you were talking about with Foreign Service Officers in some of these cases, that is the problem. We didn't do much else about it. It was an amusing situation. It makes for good conversation now. A lot of Mogen David wine. The inspection in Korea found very solid political economic reporting, the consular section, the consul general was named Dee Robinson. She is very well respected. She is ambassador to Ghana now. She was very good. There was a guy there, a deputy in something else, who was not that good, but Dee was a good friend of the head of the consular office here. What the hell is her name?

Q: Mary Ryan.

WILSON: Mary Ryan. Of course we met with Mary when we came back. My big brave consular officers in our discussions with Mary, not once did they say one thing negative about Dee Robinson. They said several negative things about two other people in the operation. But when we came out of the meeting with Mary, this was the third or fourth time I had met with her because we did this each time we came back. I said to my two guys, "Why didn't you tell her what you found?" They said, "Well, because we are consular officers. We want an assignment overseas. We know how she feels about the consul general. We are not going to blot our copy books with Mary." That is the way things go, unfortunately. I mean they weren't serious things, but Dee wasn't the paragon of efficiency and virtue that people thought, no one is that good. She is good, she is excellent, but my guys decided to put the onus of problems on two others. One of them was really bad. He was leaving the consular service anyway, so it really didn't matter. But those things happen.

The one good thing that came out of the, not good thing, the one thing that came out of the Korean inspection was that our team had nothing to do, nothing going on in early fall. I was there in Washington, and I was determined to get the inspection report out in a timely manner. Because I was there, I could walk things around from office to office. I could call people. I could come over to the State. My goal was to get the inspection report out in final form in a month. I missed that goal. I got it out in six weeks, but that was considered remarkable. It shouldn't be. It should be considered standard. The only reason that this happened was I was physically there, and I could be persuasive. A fellow just wants to get me out of their damn office. I was forceful, and one of the recommendations that I made, not in the inspection report but to the inspector general, and again it wasn't carried out, is that a member of the incoming inspection team, a fairly senior member should stay behind if that team goes out again, to shepherd the progress of the inspection report through the bureaucracy to get it out before it becomes ancient history. That is very important.

Q: Well was this about the end would you say of the Seoul thing?

WILSON: It was because I ended up in the late fall, early winter breaking my hip, and I wasn't going to go very many places. I stayed around, did a few things. They came up with some bureaucratic exercise, not just for me but for the whole inspector general's office. They were going to reform it. They set up a team. It was ridiculous. Nobody has ever, you know, for four or five months everybody is writing these reports, paying attention, taking notes, having meetings two or three times a week. Nothing ever happened. They had meetings in Baltimore and meetings out at the Wye Plantation, a lot of different things. Nothing every happened. Then I retired in the fall of '98.

Q: So what have you been involved with since you have retired?

WILSON: Well, at one point I came back in to help the Kosovo task force because I knew some of the people who were on it, some of my inspection team. To be honest, I spent about three or four days doing it and I found I didn't have to work. I did not believe in the way they were conducting things. I got out of it. You know, after the bombing of the Chinese embassy, there was a big flurry about what kind of map did you have. The deputy, the DCM in Belgrade, was there working. I had known him because we had inspected him. He had come back, and his driver had come back with him. He got a visa for his driver who was living in the States somewhere around here. The DOD called over and said, "Do you know anybody, who could help us out with a downtown map of Belgrade?" This guy said, "Well I can't, but my former driver is here, and he knows it very well, because I never paid attention to where we were going." They said, "Oh, but he is not an American citizen. We can't deal with him." About two days later they called back and asked, "Could we come over and talk with him, we really need to know where certain things are." I did some work for the new ECA bureau in the State Department. I came back as a consultant.

I don't know if I got into the visa waiver group. I assume I did when I was talking about, I hope I did. But I was chairman of the J visa waiver review committee.

Q: This is exchange students.

WILSON: The J visa, educational exchange visas. When they come over and they want to stay, to forsake the terms of their visa, the case would come before the J visa waiver review committee, and we have to make a decision. I was chairman of that for about three years. A very interesting job, but one of the things they do is to come back and now that they are moving over to State, to look at not only the J visa review side but the J visa designation side, which was formerly controlled by the office of general counsel in USIA. There was a lot of problems with the exchange organizations in that in doing that, and we found out the J visa designation unit was peopled by about seven or eight women who were there, two of whom and come over because they were doing film reviews. There was a downsizing and they had to merge. They merged the film reviews with the J visa designation unit. It was a very ineffective operation. I agreed to do this, the study would not last longer than a month. It wouldn't be agonizing. We would do a short report, which we did. Some of the reforms that we suggested were good. I then talked to someone in the consular section in the State Department because they then divided up the J visa review, the J visa designation, and the waiver review group was taken over by a lady in the State Department whose husband is Marc Grossman, Mildred Patterson. I helped out on how things could go. I worked with her a bit. I have gone back a couple of times on occasional visits to help the ECA bureau on the annual report. At the moment I am awaiting a call from the FOI office.

Q: Freedom of information.

WILSON: Freedom of information. They sent me a request back in May asking if I would come and do FOI. I filled out the papers. I didn't hear and didn't hear. Finally in September I called, "Oh yes we are working on that Mr. Wilson." In November, "Yes you are among the people who have been selected. A lot depends on money and budgets and things like this." I haven't heard more from them in January and February. I am still waiting to hear. I have all the clearances I need because I continue to keep the clearances that I had. Getting someone to call me back is very difficult, getting a particular individual to call me back, and I won't get into names. One of my philosophies when I was working in the Department was I returned every phone call every day. Occasionally you couldn't do that, but at the very least you returned their phone calls.

I think a good Foreign Service Officer, in my view, has to be willing to accept responsibility for his or her actions, and to make decisions that may or may not be popular, not just to go along with the crowd or to bury yourself in the bureaucracy and say, well, it is policy that we do this. Dammit, we as individuals make that policy, and don't hide behind it. Often in the Foreign Service, we just are content to write reports and sit back and do nothing else. Just write reports. Well, it is the bureaucracy. That is how things do or don't get done. I think, if you want to move ahead in the Foreign Service, particularly now in the 21st century, you need to be able to have the courage. You need to have courage, you need to have good common sense, good common sense judgment, and take responsibility. Very important in the Foreign Service.

Q: Absolutely.

WILSON: And be proud of it. Good career.

Q: I thank you.

WILSON: The other thing beside responsibility and working with the bureaucracy to do your will, not hiding behind it or hiding in it is you have got to care. A Foreign Service Officer has got to give a damn. Very important, care about what you do, care about your work, be involved.

Q: Yes.

End of interview